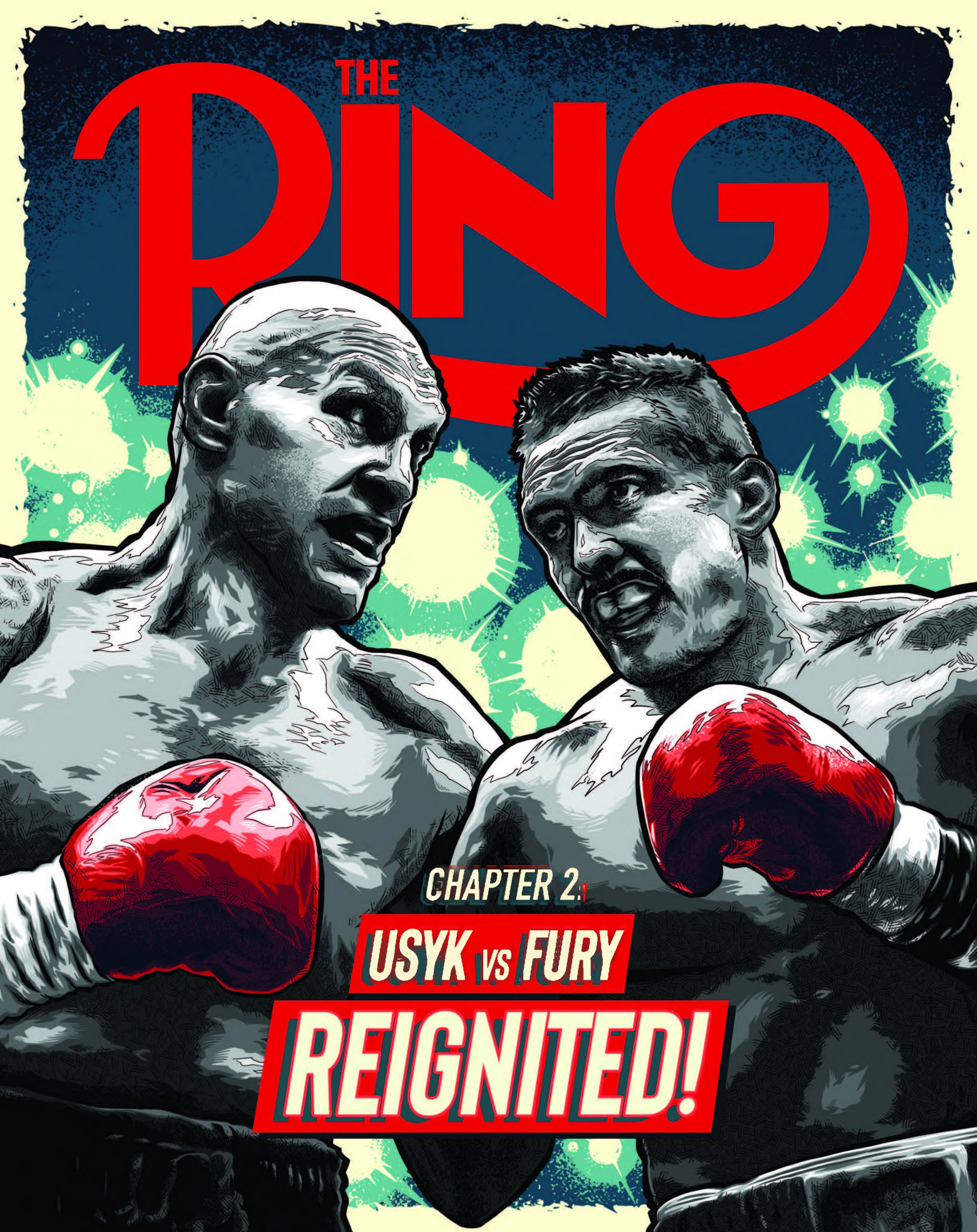
THE RING
CHAPTER 2:
USYK VS FURY
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THE RING

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COVER ILLUSTRATION BY TWELVESKETCHES

Fury: Justin Tallis; Usyk: Zac Goodwin

OPENING SHOTS

Sandy Ryan (left) played the bull to Mikaela Mayer's matador during their 10-round battle at Madison Square Garden, but the veteran Californian's bullfighting skills – aided by banderilla-like jabs and a right-hand sword – carried her to a hotly contested majority decision victory and the WBO welterweight title.

Sarah Steir

LEONE
SPORT
ANTHONY
JOSHUA

Face-distorting right hands like this one led to the biggest victory of Daniel Dubois' pro career. Dubois knocked out the heavily favored Anthony Joshua in front of a British-record crowd of 96,000 at Wembley Stadium in London.

Mark Robinson

THE RING

SPECIAL ISSUE
DECEMBER 2024

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WE'RE BACK!
(PRINT IS NOT DEAD)

Welcome to a new era of The Ring. This special issue previewing the heavyweight championship rematch between Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury is also a preview of things to come with our venerable publication.

We've got a new owner and a new logo, as well as a new website, app and YouTube channel in the works, but what's most exciting to me is that we're back in print starting with the issue you now hold in your hands (feels good, doesn't it?).

The magazine has a new format, new ongoing features and departments to debut; new artists, photographers and writers to introduce to you as we welcome back our regular contributors. It's all brought to you by the same team that produced 58 issues between 2018-2022.

Did I mention that we're returning as a monthly magazine? We will produce a 96-page collector's edition printed on high-quality heavyweight stock *every* month of 2025, plus *at least* one special issue outside of the monthly schedule.

I should also mention that the magazine will be on sale at select retailers in New York City, Miami, Los Angeles, Las Vegas and London.

It's kind of a big deal. And we're up for it!

"Reignited" is the official title for Usyk-Fury II, and it fits for The Ring's relaunch as well.

Speaking of the big December 21 rematch, after reading Usyk's and Fury's exclusive Q&A interviews in this issue, there's no doubt in my mind that the two future hall of famers will exceed the action and drama of their first fight. It could go down as one of the most significant heavyweight championship rematches in history.

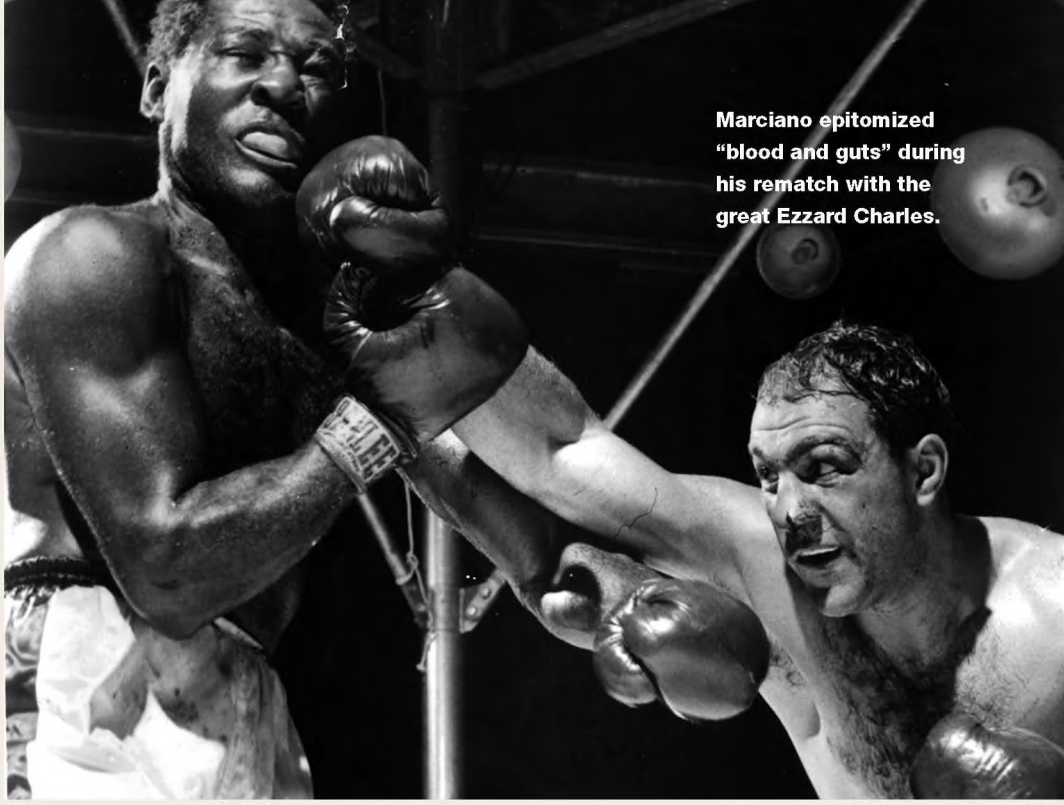
Anticipated world title return bouts in boxing's glamor division stretch back more than 100 years – James J. Jeffries' rematch against the man he defeated to become heavyweight champ, Bob Fitzsimmons, in San Francisco on July 25, 1902, made headlines in every major newspaper in the country – so Usyk and Fury will have to produce something truly special to join the pantheon.

To get an idea of the rich history that Usyk-Fury II might join, here are my choices for the 10 most significant heavyweight championship rematches of all time (listed in chronological order with the defending champion's name first, followed by the result in parentheses):

Gene Tunney vs. Jack Dempsey
September 22, 1927 (UD 10)

The infamous "Long Count" bout was a blockbuster event. More than 100,000 fans gathered at Soldier Field in Chicago to witness Dempsey's attempt to regain the title from the man who ended his legendary reign one year prior. He came close in Round 7 but some neutral corner confusion and Tunney's amazing resolve prevented him from making history.

However, the rematch made financial history as the official gross receipts of the event totalled $2,658,660 (a record at the time). Tunney's share from the live gate almost totalled $1 million ($990,445), a nice raise from his challenger's guarantee of $200,000 from their first encounter. Dempsey took home $425,000 (plus $25,000 from the film rights). Not bad for an underdog challenger (although promoter Tex Rickard still made more with his share of the profits, which exceeded $550,000).



Marciano epitomized "blood and guts" during his rematch with the great Ezzard Charles.

Joe Louis vs. Max Schmeling

June 22, 1938 (KO 1)

The title wasn't on the line in their first fight, when a young Louis was taken to school by the former champ from Germany, but it was in the rematch. America held its collective breath as the Brown Bomber, by then the defending champ, sought revenge in front of more than 70,000 fans at Yankee Stadium in New York City. The rise of Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich in Europe cast an ominous and foreboding shadow over the U.S., while the Nazi leader's designation of Schmeling as an Aryan figurehead added to Louis' motivation and his role – backed by President Franklin D. Roosevelt – as an American hero.

The bout lasted less than a round but grossed a little over $1 million. However, this fight wasn't about money. Louis' victory came to symbolize courage and hope in the face of tyranny and the coming World War.

Joe Louis vs. Jersey Joe Walcott

June 25, 1948 (KO 11)

Louis' last hurrah. After being thoroughly outboxed, dropped twice and embarrassed en route to an undeserved 15-round split decision in their first meeting, Louis set out to redeem himself in front of 42,000-plus at Yankee Stadium. The aging American hero suffered an early flash knockdown and was once again troubled by the challenger's unorthodox ring brilliance, but Louis kept the pressure on until he caught Walcott in the 11th, ending the fight in his brutal inimitable fashion. It was Louis' 25th and final title defense.

Rocky Marciano vs. Ezzard Charles

September 17, 1954 (KO 8)

Marciano is remembered for retiring undefeated and dying in a tragic airplane crash, but during his reign he was revered as the toughest son of a gun in boxing. His two bouts with Charles proved it. The first fight was a grueling 15-round battle that took a toll on both heavyweights. The rematch, which took place at Yankee Stadium before 34,000 fans just three months later, wasn't as competitive early on as Marciano bossed the aging former champ around the ring.

However, the fight took a turn in favor of Charles when Marciano suffered a vertical cut on his nose in Round 6. The cut worsened in Round 7, and began to look like Marciano's nose would split in half if the bout continued, but the champ was given one more round by referee Al Beri, because, hey, he's Rocky! Marciano did what great fighters (and great punchers) do in Round 8 – he closed the show. The bout, The Ring's Fight of the Year, was broadcast on radio, TV and in closed-circuit theaters. Both fighters took home significant shares from the gate as well as the TV money.

Ingemar Johansson vs. Floyd Patterson

June 20, 1960 (L-KO 5)

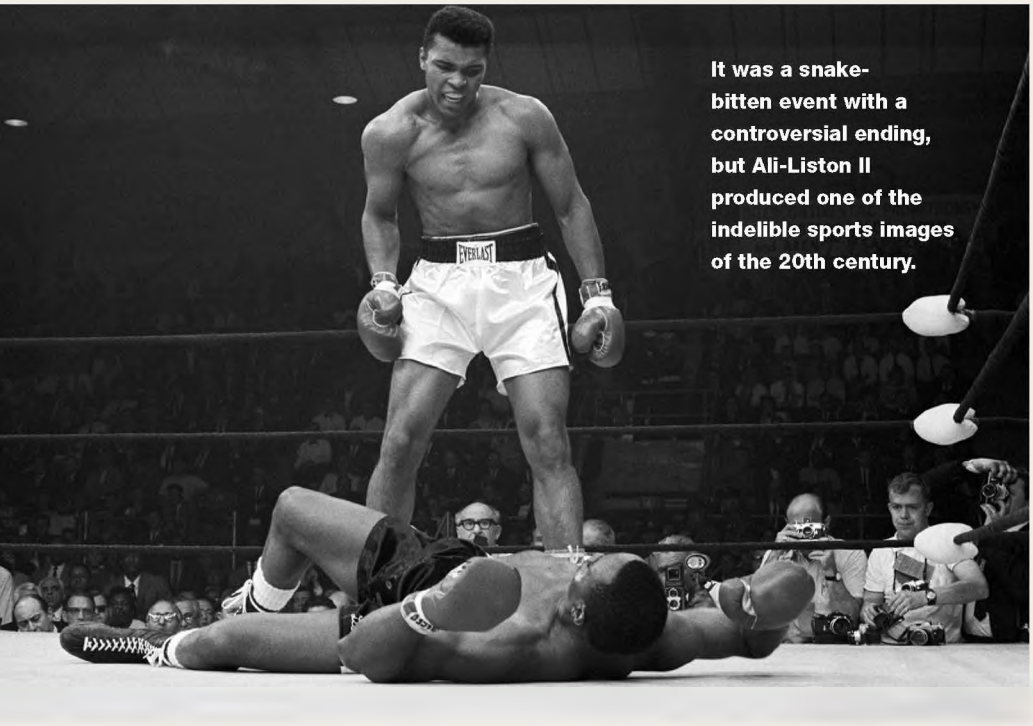
Patterson was absolutely crushed by the hard-punching Johansson in their first fight, downed seven times in three rounds. However, the popular New Yorker struck first in the rematch, which took place in front of more than 30,000 fans at the Polo Grounds in NYC, and Patterson made history as the first former heavyweight champion to regain the title. The bout, which was The Ring's choice for Fight of the Year, was a profile in modern boxing economics. The bulk of revenue came not so much from the gate (which grossed a respectable $824,814), but rather radio and TV (both domestic and foreign), and from movie and closed-circuit theater rights. The gross closed-circuit revenue totalled more than $2.2 million.

Muhammad Ali vs. Sonny Liston

May 25, 1965 (KO 1)

This is the one rematch on this list that wasn't a big event yielding substantial ticket receipts, which isn't to say that it wasn't anticipated. However, for a number of reasons – Liston's reputed mob ties, Ali's involvement with the Nation of Islam, death threats, rumors of fight fixing, etc. – the rematch of the 1964 Upset of the Year couldn't find a major city or venue in the U.S. to host it.

The bout took place in an auditorium



It was a snake-bitten event with a controversial ending, but Ali-Liston II produced one of the indelible sports images of the 20th century.

usually reserved for high school sports (St. Dom's Youth Center) in Lewiston, Maine. The result: one chaotic and controversial round. It was too weird for referee Jersey Joe Walcott, who needed Ring Magazine editor Nat Fleischer to call it off from ringside. Liston's reputation never recovered from what many believed was a dive. At least the fight generated one of the most famous moments ever captured on film.

Michael Spinks vs. Larry Holmes

April 19, 1986 (SD 15)

History was on the line in their first showdown: Holmes was set to equal Marciano's mythic 49-0 mark and Spinks aspired to be the first light heavyweight champ to win the heavyweight crown. Father Time, fitness guru Mackie Shilstone and Spinks' herky-jerky rhythm led to the razor-thin unanimous decision upset, which led to the rematch. Pride was on the line in this one, most of it belonging to Holmes, who was mad and motivated to fight like the bigger man. He did, and won in the eyes of most observers, but still lost a narrow split decision on the official scorecards, which prompted the now thoroughly jaded Holmes to provide HBO's Larry Merchant with this classic post-fight comment: "... the judges, the referees and promoters can kiss me where the sun don't shine, and because we're on HBO, that's my big, black behind."

Riddick Bowe vs. Evander Holyfield

November 6, 1993 (L-MD 12)

The bizarre Fan Man incident aside, this rematch equaled the fast-paced, high-volume action of their first bout, an instant classic won by a young and inspired 235-pound Bowe. The version of Big Daddy that entered the ring for the rematch was just as formidable but not as well-conditioned, weighing in at 246 pounds. Holyfield also put on some weight (going from 205 for the first bout to 217), and unlike Bowe, it was all muscle. The Real Deal put it to good use, took the fight to the bigger man (at the behest of new trainer Emanuel Steward) and gutted out a razor-thin majority decision to the delight of the 14,000 assembled outside of Caesars Palace in Las Vegas. The bout generated a $5.8 million gate and 950,000 pay-per-view buys, which helped make it The Ring's Event of the Year (and yeah, Fan Man was part of the entertainment value that led to that award).

Holyfield vs. Mike Tyson

June 28, 1997 (DQ 3)

"The Bite Fight." What else can be said about this surreal rematch, the catalyst to Tyson's turning full heel? Let's talk money. The event, which took place at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, broke revenue records, grossing more than $17 million from the gate and garnering almost 2 million PPV buys (amounting to close to $100 million). Holyfield was paid $35 million (a record). Tyson was paid $30 million (a record for a title challenger, although he had to pay a $3 million fine for nibbling Holyfield's ear).

Lennox Lewis vs. Holyfield

November 13, 1999 (UD 12)

Lewis' back was against the wall after having to settle for an absolutely corrupt split-draw with the celebrated American veteran in March. Holyfield brought his A-game (or as much as his aging body could muster) to the immediate rematch, held at Thomas & Mack Center in Las Vegas, but the Englishman was up to the task, battling it out to the final bell. The clear unanimous decision for Lewis delighted the 5,000 British fans in attendance, who loudly celebrated their newly crowned undisputed champion. The gate generated $16.8 million, while the PPV broadcast brought in 850,000 buys. (Side note: This was the first heavyweight championship that I covered and I can't believe it was 25 years ago!)

Honorable Mentions

(same deal as the previous 10: chronological order, defending champ's name first, result in parentheses):

Schmeling vs. Jack Sharkey

June 21, 1932 (L-SD 15)

Their first bout ended in controversy as Schmeling won the title on a foul (a low blow he couldn't recover from), the first time in history the biggest prize in

Bettmann

sports was won via DQ. The rematch, held at the Garden Bowl in Long Island City, New York, before 61,000, was equally controversial – this time because nobody apart from two of the judges thought Sharkey deserved to have his hand raised after 15 rounds.

Louis vs. Billy Conn

June 19, 1946 (KO 8)

Their first bout was an all-time classic. The return bout, which took place five years later, was an all-time letdown. Both fighters were diminished following their four-year USO service during World War II, but the naturally bigger man had more left in the tank, and the punch is the last thing to go on an aging fighter. The fight, staged in front of more than 45,000 at Yankee Stadium, is notable as the first time a heavyweight title bout was broadcast live on TV (NBC).

Leon Spinks vs. Ali

September 15, 1978 (L-UD 15)

Ali was an old 36 when Leon Spinks outhustled him over 15 rounds to take the heavyweight crown in February 1978. Spinks was a 1976 Olympic champ but also a 10-1 underdog due to his inexperience (seven pro bouts). Ali, a shell of his former greatness, couldn't keep up with the 24 year old. However, his pride and spirit – along with a jab-and-grab strategy – was enough to regain the title an unprecedented third time in front of 63,352 inside the Superdome in New Orleans. The indoor record crowd produced a $4.8 million gate (another record), while an estimated U.S. audience of 90 million watched the bout live on ABC (yet another record). Ali's last hurrah was seen by an estimated worldwide audience of 2 billion.

Holmes vs. Earnie Shavers

September 28, 1979 (TKO 11)

Their first bout was an uneventful 12-round WBC title eliminator won by Holmes, but the belt he earned with his epic battle vs. Ken Norton the previous year was on the line in the rematch and it almost changed hands in Round 7. Shavers, one of the great heavyweight punchers, delivered arguably the hardest punch ever landed on a champion that didn't knock him out. Hall-of-fame sportswriter Doug Krikorian says it's the LOUDEST punch he ever witnessed from ringside. But Holmes did what great boxers do in those situations: He got off his ass and got back to work en route to a late stoppage.

Frank Bruno vs. Tyson

March 16, 1996 (L-TKO 3)

A deer-in-the-headlights Bruno (who was hyperventilating BEFORE the bout began) was no match for even the faded, post-prison version of Iron Mike, who regained the same green WBC belt he won at the record age of 20. The bout, held at the MGM Grand in Las Vegas, did a $10.6 million gate and garnered 1.37 million PPV buys (generating $58.3 million).

Holyfield vs. Michael Moorer

November 8, 1997 (RTD 8)

This stoppage, which avenged a 1994 points loss to the sullen southpaw, unified the IBF and WBA belts and enabled Holyfield to win The Ring's Fighter of the Year award for the third time (in back-to-back years).

Hasim Rahman vs. Lewis

November 17, 2001 (L-KO 4)

Man, was I wrong about this matchup. I figured the Baltimore-bred American, who shocked Lewis seven months earlier in South Africa, had the Englishman's number as well as his heart (after out-grappling him during an ESPN studio scuffle). But Lewis reminded all of us American haters that he's arguably an all-time great with the manner he dispatched Rahman. The internet was still "new media" at this time, so only newspaper guys were on the floor. MaxBoxing.com colleague Steve Kim and I witnessed the fight from an auxiliary media sky box inside the Mandalay Bay Event Center, but the bird's-eye view of Rahman splayed out on the canvas only made Lewis' KO more memorable.

Holyfield vs. Ruiz

March 3, 2001 (L-UD 12)

I was ringside for this one, too, also held at the Mandalay Bay in Las Vegas. It wasn't the most interesting contest, but Ruiz's points victory (punctuated by an 11th-round knockdown) made him the first Latino heavyweight world titleholder. It also spelled the end of Holyfield as a legit title threat, although he'd stick around for another decade.

Wladimir Klitschko vs. Chris Byrd

April 22, 2006 (L-TKO 7)

Two years after being written off following his KO loss to Lamon Brewster, Klitschko began his hall-of-fame-clinching second reign against his undersized familiar foe. He went on to make 18 defenses of the IBF title he lifted from Byrd, adding the WBA, WBO and Ring Magazine belts to his collection during a 9½-year unbeaten streak.

Wilder vs. Fury

February 22, 2020 (L-TKO 7)

Like Lewis-Holyfield, this rematch followed a controversial draw verdict (although not as egregious). Unlike Lewis-Holyfield II, this one was not competitive as Fury steamrolled Wilder, dropping the unbeaten WBC beltholder twice before the American's corner waved it off midway through Round 7. The emphatic victory earned Fury his second Ring Magazine title and co-Fighter of the Year honors.

So, there's 20 heavyweight title rematches for you. Some are great, some are not so great, but all are significant in my view. If you disagree with any of my choices or think I left out an important rematch, please let me – and Ring Magazine readers – know via email at comeoutwriting@gmail.com. If you have strong opinions on *anything* boxing related, share them with us. Your words will be immortalized in print!

NEW FACES By Anson Wainwright

David Nyika

Age: 29
Birthplace: Hamilton, New Zealand
Weight class: Cruiserweight
Height/reach:
6-foot-6 (198 cm)/79 inches (201 cm)
Amateur record: 85-13
Turned pro: 2021
Pro record: 10-0 (9 knockouts)
Trainer: Noel Thornberry
Manager: Noel Thornberry
Promoter:
Duco Events and Thornberry Promotions
Instagram: @davidnyika

BEST NIGHT: Nyika shined on the big stage while bludgeoning the previously unbeaten Michael Seitz to a fourth-round knockout on the undercard of Oleksandr Usyk-Tyson Fury I.

He had his chin tested early on while holding off a bullish Seitz, but he stamped his authority on the fight once he realized his German opponent couldn't hurt him. Despite Nyika's substantial height and reach – things that would allow him to fight from a safer distance – he was eager to get in close and do damage.

"It was more an accumulation of punches, but it was a left rip to the body that put him down," Nyika told The Ring. "We had expected to break him down in Rounds 4, 5 and 6 as opposed to 2, 3 and finishing him in 4. That was kind of a light bulb moment for me, where I felt like I did exactly what I was supposed to do, given the quality of opponent in front of me."

WORST NIGHT: The 29-year-old was overconfident in his third fight (UD 5 Karim Maatalla) in June 2022.

"The Karim Maatalla fight was a bit more of a test than I expected," he admitted. "Karim had a pretty ordinary record (2-1, 2 KOs) and I was starting to believe my own hype a little bit, coming from [training alongside Tyson Fury], putting a few dents in some big characters in the U.K. and coming back and expecting to do well.

"I was trying to punch holes in Karim, not knowing him very well. I found out pretty quickly that he was super tough."

Despite the miscalculation, Nyika says working with pro boxer-turned-trainer Noel Thornberry has been crucial to his own transition from the amateurs.

"Starting to work with Noel, I realized I was developing a style that was going to take me all the way."

WHAT'S NEXT: It should be noted that Nyika's most recent fight (in mid-September) was a step up against former light heavyweight title challenger Tommy Karpency (31-9-1, 19 KOs). Yes, the American is now 38, past his prime and has been relatively inactive, but he's an experienced southpaw who has shared the ring with five world titleholders.

The tantalizing question for the distant future is whether the 6-foot-6 New Zealander could take a shot at heavyweight. At the time of publication, however, he had nothing scheduled.

WHY HE'S A PROSPECT: As a standout amateur, Nyika won gold at the 2014 and 2018 Commonwealth Games and lost to the eventual silver and gold medalists at the 2017 and 2019 World Championships, respectively. He won a bronze medal at the

HANNAH PETERS

2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Nyika has had excellent sparring with Chris Billam-Smith, Lawrence Okolie and Joshua Buatsi. among others, and has been in camp with Tyson Fury, stablemate Joseph Parker and rising force Martin Bakole.

He has also spent a lot of time with Ring and IBF cruiserweight champion Jai Opetaia, who he first met at the 2011 Junior World Championships.

"I think the next year he went to the London Olympics," Nyika said. "I was a late bloomer. I was still a child back then. He's been a unit since a very young age. I've matured like a fine wine, if I don't say so myself. (laughs)

"I definitely see him as a future opponent. We don't spar anymore. I think I've got enough intel and insight to know where his strengths and weaknesses are. I believe Jai is without doubt the best cruiserweight in the world today, and I'm on my way to disrupt the party."

Similar to others who fought at cruiserweight before going on to success at heavyweight, Nyika is able to fight at a high pace. He is an avid runner and uses that to build his endurance. He has the height and frame to easily match the men in boxing's top division, but he still has much to do and achieve at 200 pounds.

WHY HE'S A SUSPECT: The most apparent issue is that Nyika gives up space and allows his opponent inside, where he trades with them. While that makes for more exciting fights, he should perhaps temper the urge and explore keeping his opponents honest behind a strong jab. We've seen it, and it could be a very, very difficult tool for his opponents to get past, if honed.

"I think the biggest challenge moving forward is believing in myself, understanding and truly believing in the hard work I'm putting in," said Nyika.

"I think it's a Kiwi thing. We don't like to stick our head above others, and at some point you have to actually recognize your own strength and power to change the world, and I think recognizing that will be the difference. Moving forward, I want to keep building on my own belief."

STORYLINES: Nyika hails from Hamilton in New Zealand's North Island. In his first year of high school, he tried his country's favorite pastime – rugby – but it wasn't for him.

"I was just too small," he said with a tinge of irony, given the specimen he has become. "I'd always had a fascination with martial arts. My dad was a bit of an encyclopedia when it comes to boxing. He grew up watching all the greats, but his dad would never let him take part in a combat sport, so when I started showing interest, he was really excited to be a part of that process of finding a gym and getting to know a coach."

With that in mind, he began his journey at 14.

"I always felt like I had a point to prove, having an older brother to chase around and always compete against," he said. "If we were at the dining table, I was trying to eat more. If we were running around the block, I was trying to beat him. Having that chaser's mentality, I think that's what drove me to be the competitive athlete I am today."

After turning professional in February 2021, he quickly headed to the UK and joined Tyson Fury's training camp. His six-month stay was a turning point.

"Going there and training like the world champ, it was helpful, but it wasn't for me," he said. "I love to run. I love the heat; I need the heat. The cold over there got to my bones. Being in the warm Queensland Australia weather under the sun, on the roads, I run about 40 kilometers a week. I can run and I get so much from it. ... Running with bigger guys, I didn't feel I was maximizing that special attribute.

"Having the available sparring, the body sparring, the whole mentality in that camp was they are fighting men. I felt like I was more of a competitor. Training with the Furys, I realized right away this is the fight game. This is the hurt game. Tyson pulled me up really, really early and let me know where I was lacking, and a lot of it was my intent around fighting and how and why you do what you do. I'm starting to realize this is not tiddlywinks. I'm not trying to outscore guys, I'm trying to out-man them and break them down."

Nyika has relocated to Gatton, a rural town in northeast Queensland. His partner is his coach's daughter, Lexi. He works part-time as a caretaker at an apartment complex, which keeps him grounded. He enjoys the quiet country life and enjoys spending time outside in the warm weather tending to his garden.

SCOUTING REPORT CARD:

Boxing Skills: B

Nyika has good skills and solid fundamentals, which come from his amateur pedigree, but he needs to make the most of his size and jab to reach the "A" level.

Power: B+

He gets good leverage and snap on his punches, but we have yet to see how that translates at a higher level.

Speed: B

He is a good athlete with fluid punch flow and movement.

Potential: A

He ticks all the boxes as a fighter and definitely looks like he could make the step to becoming a cruiserweight attraction in his home region. From there, the world opens up.

Ring IQ: A

He's smart, and you can see that by talking to him and understanding that while many would blindly follow the Fury camp, he knew it wasn't for him and went his own way. In the ring, that self-awareness shows as an ability to acknowledge and learn quickly from his mistakes.

Overall Package: B+

He's a well-rounded, good boxer with solid power for a cruiserweight. He appears to take a good shot and is one of if not the brightest hope in the cruiserweight division coming through.

BY THE NUMBERS:

Abe Attell

by Don Stradley

When Abe Attell died in 1970, Edwin Pope of the Miami Herald claimed the 87-year-old "never missed a drink or a party. He was the worst kind of advertisement for clean living."

Indeed, Attell was a little man who lived large. Here's his story by the numbers...

21 title defenses »

Sources differ over Attell's exact number of title defenses, but there is no denying that he was a fighting champion. The International Boxing Hall of Fame credits him with 21 defenses during his second reign. Some bouts during his somewhat less official first term were also billed as title fights, so his exact total of successful defenses may always be a subject for debate. Some of the fighters who tried and failed to take Attell's crown include Benny "Kid" Solomon, Eddie Kelly and Owen Moran. • Johnny Kilbane, whom Attell had defeated in 1910, eventually beat Attell for the title in 1912.

11 years as America's top featherweight »

From 1901 to 1912, there was hardly a better man at featherweight than Abraham Washington Attell of San Francisco. He was only 18 when he scored a 15-round decision over the highly regarded George "Little Chocolate" Dixon in 1901. The bout was billed as being for the vacant featherweight title, though Attell's status as champion was tenuous. In 1903, Attell won a 20-round decision over Johnny Reagan in a bout that was, again, for the vacant title, but the featherweight picture was still muddled. A loss to Tommy Sullivan ended whatever claim he had on the title in 1904. Attell finally won legitimate recognition as champion by beating Jimmy Walsh in 1906. With the crown now firmly on his head, Attell seemed unbeatable for the next six years. • Along with being a master boxer, Attell could brawl and slug with anybody. He could also be a first-class cheater, never meeting a rule he couldn't bend.

1 draw with Battling Nelson »

Attell was so dominant at featherweight that he occasionally stepped up in weight to take on bigger challenges. He twice fought Oscar "Battling" Nelson, a vicious lightweight described by one writer as "shovelhead," which gives an idea of both his appearance and fighting style. Their first bout was a no-decision contest in 1905, which the press gave to Attell. Their second fight took place at the San Francisco Coliseum in 1908 and was declared a 15-round draw. The verdict seemed fair to most observers. • "Where Nelson was the aggressor throughout the sensational struggle, Attell showed the greater skill as a boxer," reported the San Francisco Call and Post. • Attell, of course, thought he won handily. • "I was never in danger during any stage of the contest," Attell boasted, "and I finished up fresh."

5 bouts with Jimmy Walsh »
Walsh was not Attell's most famous opponent, but their rivalry was deep. They met for the first time in Chelsea, Massachusetts, for the vacant featherweight title in February 1906. Attell won the fight, and the title, by 15-round decision. A rematch later that year in Los Angeles saw Attell win by knockout in the ninth. Attell made it three in a row the next year in Indianapolis, beating Walsh by 10-round decision. • Their fourth bout, held in Walsh's hometown of Boston after Attell's title reign, was a debacle. Attell couldn't make weight and at the last minute asked for the fight to be at a catchweight. Walsh's camp agreed, but only if the rounds were shortened to two minutes. With fans jeering the quick rounds and a gang of hoodlums running amok through the arena and smashing windows, the two old rivals boxed to a drab 10-round draw. "Attell is far from being the Attell of old," reported the Boston Globe, "although he showed flashes of his old cleverness." • Their final clash was a 10-round "newspaper decision" contest in 1913. The observer from the Globe noted that Attell abandoned his usual scientific style and instead "turned his attention to planting a stiff wallop." He was aggressive throughout and had Walsh on the verge of a knockout at least twice.

171 total bouts »
Or was it 154? The old Ring record books gave his record as 91-9-13, with 53 KOs, 51 no-decision bouts and two no-contests. In recent years, however, researchers have whittled away at those totals. Historians claim Attell's earliest recorded bouts were amateur contests and shouldn't be counted. The truth was always malleable where Attell was concerned.

1 World Series scandal »
Attell was accused in 1920 of helping fix the infamous 1919 World Series. He was said to have worked behind the scenes with gangster Arnold Rothstein to pay members of the Chicago White Sox to lose the series against Cincinnati. • Could he have been involved? It is possible. As great as he'd been in the ring, Attell was crooked in spirit, known for occasionally throwing a fight to gain a more lucrative rematch. He also admitted to having bet on certain opponents to go the distance in a fight, and then carrying them to the finish. He knew all the angles and he played them. Moreover, Attell was a notorious gambler. There was even a time where he served as Rothstein's bodyguard. • When Attell was indicted along with several members of the White Sox, he denied being part of such a big operation. He claimed he was accused solely because he was friendly with the team and happened to know some gamblers. In a startling example of legal brio, Attell's attorney argued that there was no proof that his client was the same man identified by the players as "Abe Attell." • He never appeared in court and the state's attorney allowed his case to lapse, but Attell was forever linked with perhaps the biggest scandal in professional sports history. At one point, Attell vowed to reveal the names of all who were involved, but he never did. For the remainder of his life, he'd artfully duck any questions about the 1919 series. If it was brought up, he'd change the subject immediately. Though he had a long and colorful life, there was always a cloud of dishonor hanging over boxing's not-so-honest Abe.

20 rounds with Harlem Tommy Murphy (twice!) »
Attell fought Murphy twice in 1912, each time for 20 rounds. They already knew each other well, having fought three newspaper decision contests in previous years. Their first 20-rounder took place on March 10, shortly after Attell lost the featherweight title. For the first five rounds, Murphy gave Attell a beating, though Attell started to fire back in the sixth and managed to take most of the next 10 rounds. Attell tired, however, allowing Murphy to finish strong. The result after 20 rounds was a victory for Murphy. The story, however, was just beginning. • Murphy's camp alleged that Attell had approached their fighter prior to the bout with an offer of $4,000 (approximately $130,000 today) to "foul out" in the fifth and get himself disqualified. It was so the ex-champion could get a win and perhaps a rematch with Kilbane for the title. Murphy refused the offer, but no one told Attell. • Thinking the fight was in the bag for him, Attell barely trained. When the fifth round passed and Attell realized Murphy wasn't following any script, he had no choice but to start fighting back in earnest. Even though he was out of shape, Attell managed to turn the fight his way for several rounds. • A rematch held in August of that year ended in a 20-round draw. By the end of this seesaw battle, both men were covered in blood. Referee Jim Griffin called it "as even a match as I ever saw."

2 fighting brothers »
Two of Attell's brothers were also reputable fighters. Monte Attell had a reported 137 total bouts and was briefly recognized as the bantamweight champion, making him and Abe the first brother duo to hold titles simultaneously. A third brother, Caesar, had 29 professional bouts.

Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of October 26, 2024 • By Diego Morilla

POUND-FOR-POUND: Finally it happened. The most anticipated light heavyweight showdown in years took place when **Dmitry Bivol** and **Artur Beterbiev** put it all on the line for pride and country. And the vacant Ring Magazine belt. And depending on their performance, an upgrade in their positions in the mythical pound-for-pound ratings.

The showdown was expected to be a 50-50 matchup, and that was reflected in the result. In the end, it was the 39-year-old Beterbiev who earned a majority decision and the undisputed championship.

It was a great fight with an equally expected dose of controversy in the result. But it was more than enough to shake the rust off the dormant list of the best fighters in the world regardless of weight, with Beterbiev riding his victory to a career-best No. 4 position (rising from No. 6). After a terrific performance of his own, Bivol followed suit and climbed from No. 7 all the way up to No. 5, leapfrogging Canelo Alvarez and Jesse Rodriguez.

HEAVYWEIGHT: A crossroads bout was promised, and the fighters delivered. Daniel Dubois was surely aiming to reignite his career, but he might've even surprised himself when he knocked out Anthony Joshua in the fifth round. Dubois rose from No. 6 to take Joshua's No. 2 position in the ratings, while Joshua's four visits to the canvas in a career-threatening performance were more than enough to send him tumbling to No. 7, below Martin Bakole. Later in the month, Fabio Wardley scored a one-round demolition of Frazer Clarke in a rematch to claim the No. 10 position.

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHT: Willy Hutchinson dropped a split decision to Joshua Buatsi and slipped from No. 9 to No. 10 as a result, while Buatsi stayed put at No. 4. Then the Beterbiev-Bivol clash happened. With No. 1-rated Beterbiev claiming the vacant Ring belt and moving into the champion slot, everyone on the list moved up one spot, allowing room for Russia's Ali Izmailov to enter at No. 10.

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHT: Canelo Alvarez held on to his Ring championship in his traditional Mexican Independence Day weekend appearance by taking care of Edgar Berlanga in a one-sided affair. Berlanga would've held his position at No. 7, but then Caleb Plant re-entered the top 10 at No. 5 after beating Trevor McCumby, and everyone below him dropped down one spot. But that was just the beginning of a serious reshuffle in the division. Jaime Munguia's stoppage win over Erik Bazinyan earned the Tijuana native a jump over Christian Mbilli into the No. 1 position, with Bazinyan slipping from No. 7 to No. 8. Later, Cuba's William Scull defeated Vladimir Shishkin to crash into the party at No. 6, pushing Shishkin down to No. 7 and Bazinyan down another notch. Bektemir Melikuziev, sitting at No. 10, was pushed off the list entirely.

MIDDLEWEIGHT: One of boxing's showcase divisions is currently undergoing a transition period, and several changes took place in mid-September. Hamzah Sheeraz's win over Tyler Denny propelled Sheeraz to No. 2 and pushed Denny out of the top 10, and No. 7-rated Liam Smith also lost his position due to inactivity. Newcomers Troy Isley and Shane Mosley Jr. were brought in to replace him and Denny at the bottom of the list. Among the mainstays, Erislandy Lara held onto his No. 4 spot with a stoppage win over Danny Garcia, and Kazakh powerhouse Zhanibek Alimkhanuly secured his No. 1 position with a demolition of Andrei Mikhailovich.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Erickson Lubin dropped out due to inactivity after 294 weeks in our ratings, and with his No. 7 position left vacant everyone was moved up one spot to make room for the return of Bakhram Murtazaliev at No. 10. But the Russian fighter would not stay there for long, riding his terrific win over Tim Tszyu on October 19 all the way to the No. 3 position while Tszyu (formerly No. 5) dropped to No. 7.

JUNIOR WELTERWEIGHT: Andy Hiraoka entered the top 10 at No. 9 after a stoppage win over Ismael Barroso, which crowded out No. 10-rated Gary Antuanne Russell. Hiraoka then gained another rank after Jack Catterall's dominant win over Regis Prograis in their long-awaited matchup kicked New Orleans' "Rougarou" out of the ratings from his No. 8 position. "El Gato" Catterall rose from No. 4 to No. 2 and Jose Valenzuela took the vacancy at No. 10.

LIGHTWEIGHT: Mark Chamberlain (No. 9) exited the ratings following his loss to Josh Padley, but U.K. countryman Sam Noakes picked up the flag and planted it at No. 10 on the strength of a recent win over Gianluca Ceglia. The shift also gave former amateur standout Andy Cruz, still just 4-0, a further foothold in the division with a promotion to No. 9.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: **Anthony Cacace** outpointed **Josh Warrington** in a non-title bout, but the win was more than enough for the IBF beltholder from Northern Ireland to move up one spot to No. 4, jumping over Lamont Roach.

FEATHERWEIGHT: Nick Ball landed at No. 3 after his 10-round demolition job on Ronny Rios in Liverpool, with former foe Rey Vargas moving down to No. 4 seven months after their fight that ended in a draw. Argentine Olympian and blue-chip prospect Mirco Cuello finally broke in at No. 10 after Warrington (the previous No. 10) moved up in weight. Everybody on the list then got a one-spot bump after No. 1-rated Leigh Wood was dropped for inactivity, elevating Angelo Leo to the top position and allowing Bruce Carrington to enter at No. 10.

Canelo Alvarez remained in the pound-for-pound rankings and retained the 168-pound championship with a unanimous decision over Edgar Berlanga.

OMAR VEGA; (RIGHT) BETERBIEV/BIVOL: RICHARD PELHAM; WARRINGTON/CACACE: MARK ROBINSON

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT: Stephen Fulton (No. 1) returned to action more than one year after his loss to Naoya Inoue. Fulton's win over Carlos Castro was at featherweight, however, so he exited and left the division needing a new boss and a new No. 10. Marlon Tapales moved up to the top position while newly crowned European champion Dennis McCann came in at No. 10.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Seiya Tsutsumi's unanimous decision win over Takuma Inoue was rewarded with a leap all the way from No. 9 to No. 3, with Inoue dropping from No. 3 to No. 5.

JUNIOR BANTAMWEIGHT: By far the most unexpected irruption into any top 10 took place after South Africa's Phumelele Cafu came from nowhere to No. 4 after scoring a huge upset with a razor-thin points win over the incumbent No. 4, Kosei Tanaka, in Japan. The result dropped the local legend down one spot and kicked Kenbun Torres out of the ratings.

FLYWEIGHT: Former 108-pound titlist Kenshiro Teraji made his debut in the division at No. 3 with his win over No. 9-rated Cristofer Rosales, also picking up a vacant title in the process. Rosales exited the top 10, as did David Jimenez, who now fights at 115 pounds. The latter departure opened the door for Mexico's Francisco "Chihuas" Rodriguez to break back into the mix at the bottom of the list.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1	**OLEKSANDR USYK**	Ukraine • 22-0-0 (14 KOs)
2	**NAOYA INOUE**	Japan • 28-0-0 (25 KOs)
3	**TERENCE CRAWFORD**	U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)
4	**ARTUR BETERBIEV**	Russia • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
5	**DMITRY BIVOL**	Russia • 23-1-0 (12 KOs)
6	**CANELO ALVAREZ**	Mexico • 62-2-2 (39 KOs)
7	**JESSE RODRIGUEZ**	U.S. • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)
8	**GERVONTA DAVIS**	U.S. • 30-0-0 (28 KOs)
9	**JUNTO NAKATANI**	Japan • 29-0-0 (22 KOs)
10	**DEVIN HANEY**	U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)

JUNIOR FLYWEIGHT: Teraji's move up in weight left the division's Ring championship vacant and coincided with an overhaul of the division that was driven by a few fight outcomes. Jonathan Gonzalez abandoned his lofty No. 1 position to compete at flyweight, and Masamichi Yabuki's concurrent win over Sivenathi Nontshinga was enough for him to pick up the mantle, rising from No. 6 to No. 1. Fighting on the same card as Teraji's flyweight debut, Shokichi Iwata earned a jump from No. 7 to No. 2 with his third-round stoppage win over Jairo Noriega. The void left by Gonzalez's departure was filled by fellow Caribbean boxer-puncher Erick Rosa at No. 10.

STRAWWEIGHT: Knockout CP Freshmart advanced to No. 2 after an impressive 12-round majority decision over Alex Winwood. Melvin Jerusalem's one-sided decision over Luis Castillo lifted him up one position to No. 3. Castillo exited the top 10 after the defeat, allowing for China's DianXing Zhu to come in at the bottom of the list.

HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT UNLIMITED

C	**OLEKSANDR USYK**	Ukraine • 22-0-0 (14 KOs)
1	**TYSON FURY**	U.K. • 34-1-1 (24 KOs)
2	**DANIEL DUBOIS**	U.K. • 22-2-0 (21 KOs)
3	**JOSEPH PARKER**	New Zealand • 35-3-0 (23 KOs)
4	**ZHILEI ZHANG**	China • 27-2-1 (22 KOs)
5	**AGIT KABAYEL**	Germany • 25-0-0 (17 KOs)
6	**MARTIN BAKOLE**	Congo • 21-1-0 (16 KOs)
7	**ANTHONY JOSHUA**	U.K. • 28-4-0 (25 KOs)
8	**FILIP HRGOVIC**	Croatia • 17-1-0 (14 KOs)
9	**FABIO WARDLEY**	U.K. • 18-0-1 (17 KOs)
10	**EFE AJAGBA**	Nigeria • 20-1-0 (14 KOs)

CRUISERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 200 POUNDS

C	**JAI OPETAIA**	Australia • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)
1	**CHRIS BILLAM-SMITH**	U.K. • 20-1-0 (13 KOs)
2	**NOEL GEVOR MIKAELYAN**	Armenia • 27-2-0 (12 KOs)
3	**GILBERTO RAMIREZ**	Mexico • 46-1-0 (30 KOs)
4	**ALEKSEI PAPIN**	Russia • 18-1-0 (17 KOs)
5	**RICHARD RIAKPORHE**	U.K. • 17-1-0 (13 KOs)
6	**ARSEN GOULAMIRIAN**	France • 27-1-0 (19 KOs)
7	**MICHAL CIESLAK**	Poland • 27-2-0 (21 KOs)
8	**RYAN ROZICKI**	Canada • 20-1-0 (19 KOs)
9	**YAMIL PERALTA**	Argentina • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)
10	**CHEAVON CLARKE**	U.K. • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)

LIGHT HEAVYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 175 POUNDS

C	**ARTUR BETERBIEV**	Russia • 21-0-0 (20 KOs)
1	**DMITRY BIVOL**	Russia • 23-1-0 (12 KOs)
2	**DAVID BENAVIDEZ**	U.S. • 29-0-0 (24 KOs)
3	**JOSHUA BUATSI**	U.K. • 19-0-0 (13 KOs)
4	**ANTHONY YARDE**	U.K. • 26-3-0 (24 KOs)
5	**ALBERT RAMIREZ**	Venezuela • 19-0-0 (16 KOs)
6	**CALLUM SMITH**	U.K. • 29-2-0 (21 KOs)
7	**OLEKSANDR GVOZDYK**	Ukraine • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)
8	**DAVID MORRELL**	Cuba • 11-0-0 (9 KOs)
9	**WILLY HUTCHINSON**	U.K. • 18-2-0 (13 KOs)
10	**ALI IZMAILOV**	Russia • 12-0-0 (8 KOs)

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C	**CANELO ALVAREZ**	Mexico • 62-2-2 (39 KOs)
1	**JAIME MUNGUIA**	Mexico • 44-1-0 (35 KOs)
2	**CHRISTIAN MBILLI**	France • 28-0-0 (23 KOs)
3	**OSLEYS IGLESIAS**	Cuba • 12-0-0 (11 KOs)
4	**DIEGO PACHECO**	U.S. • 22-0-0 (18 KOs)
5	**CALEB PLANT**	U.S. • 23-2-0 (14 KOs)
6	**WILLIAM SCULL**	Cuba • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
7	**VLADIMIR SHISHKIN**	Russia • 16-1-0 (10 KOs)
8	**EDGAR BERLANGA**	U.S. • 22-1-0 (17 KOs)
9	**ERIK BAZINYAN**	Canada • 32-1-1 (23 KOs)
10	**LESTER MARTINEZ**	Guatemala • 18-0-0 (15 KOs)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **ZHANIBEK ALIMKHANULY**
Kazakhstan • 16-0-0 (11 KOs)

2 **HAMZAH SHEERAZ**
U.K. • 21-0-0 (17 KOs)

3 **CARLOS ADAMES**
Dom. Rep. • 24-1-0 (18 KOs)

4 **ERISLANDY LARA**
Cuba • 31-3-3 (19 KOs)

5 **CHRIS EUBANK JR.**
U.K. • 34-3-0 (25 KOs)

6 **MEIIRIM NURSULTANOV**
Kazakhstan • 20-0-0 (11 KOs)

7 **ETINOSA OLIHA**
Italy • 21-0-0 (9 KOs)

8 **KYRONE DAVIS**
U.S. • 19-3-1 (6 KOs)

9 **TROY ISLEY**
U.S. • 13-0-0 (5 KOs)

10 **SHANE MOSLEY JR.**
U.S. • 22-4-0 (12 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **TERENCE CRAWFORD**
U.S. • 41-0-0 (31 KOs)

2 **ISRAIL MADRIMOV**
Uzbekistan • 10-1-1 (7 KOs)

3 **BAKHRAM MURTAZALIEV**
Russia • 23-0-0 (17 KOs)

4 **SEBASTIAN FUNDORA**
U.S. • 21-1-1 (13 KOs)

5 **VERGIL ORTIZ**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (21 KOs)

6 **SERHII BOHACHUK**
Ukraine • 24-2-0 (23 KOs)

7 **TIM TSZYU**
Australia • 24-2-0 (17 KOs)

8 **JESUS RAMOS**
U.S. • 21-1-0 (17 KOs)

9 **CHARLES CONWELL**
U.S. • 20-0-0 (15 KOs)

10 **BRIAN MENDOZA**
U.S. • 22-4-0 (16 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **JARON ENNIS**
U.S. • 32-0-0 (29 KOs)

2 **EIMANTAS STANIONIS**
Lithuania • 15-0-0 (9 KOs)

3 **MARIO BARRIOS**
U.S. • 29-2-0 (18 KOs)

4 **DAVID AVANESYAN**
Russia • 30-5-1 (18 KOs)

5 **BRIAN NORMAN JR.**
U.S. • 26-0-0 (20 KOs)

6 **GIOVANI SANTILLAN**
U.S. • 32-1-0 (17 KOs)

7 **SHAKHRAM GIYASOV**
Uzbekistan • 16-0-0 (9 KOs)

8 **ALEXIS ROCHA**
U.S. • 25-2-0 (16 KOs)

9 **JIN SASAKI**
Japan • 18-1-1 (17 KOs)

10 **RAUL CURIEL**
Mexico • 15-0-0 (13 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C **TEOFIMO LOPEZ**
U.S. • 21-1-0 (13 KOs)

1 **DEVIN HANEY**
U.S. • 31-0-0 (15 KOs)

2 **JACK CATTERALL**
U.K. • 30-1-0 (13 KOs)

3 **JOSE RAMIREZ**
U.S. • 29-1-0 (18 KOs)

4 **LIAM PARO**
Australia • 25-0-0 (15 KOs)

5 **ALBERTO PUELLO**
Dom. Rep. • 23-0-0 (10 KOs)

6 **SUBRIEL MATIAS**
Puerto Rico • 20-2-0 (20 KOs)

7 **JOSH TAYLOR**
U.K. • 19-2-0 (13 KOs)

8 **ANDY HIRAOKA**
Japan • 24-0-0 (19 KOs)

9 **RICHARDSON HITCHINS**
U.S. • 18-0-0 (7 KOs)

10 **JOSE VALENZUELA**
U.S. • 14-2-0 (9 KOs)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **GERVONTA DAVIS**
U.S. • 30-0-0 (28 KOs)

2 **VASILIY LOMACHENKO**
Ukraine • 18-3-0 (12 KOs)

3 **WILLIAM ZEPEDA**
Mexico • 31-0-0 (27 KOs)

4 **SHAKUR STEVENSON**
U.S. • 22-0-0 (10 KOs)

5 **DENYS BERINCHYK**
Ukraine • 19-0-0 (9 KOs)

6 **RAYMOND MURATALLA**
U.S. • 21-0-0 (16 KOs)

7 **KEYSHAWN DAVIS**
U.S. • 11-0-0 (7 KOs)

8 **FRANK MARTIN**
U.S. • 18-1-0 (12 KOs)

9 **ANDY CRUZ**
Cuba • 4-0-0 (2 KOs)

10 **SAM NOAKES**
U.K. • 15-0-0 (14 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **EMANUEL NAVARRETE**
Mexico • 38-2-1 (31 KOs)

2 **O'SHAQUIE FOSTER**
U.S. • 22-3-0 (12 KOs)

3 **OSCAR VALDEZ**
Mexico • 32-2-0 (24 KOs)

4 **ANTHONY CACACE**
Ireland • 23-1-0 (8 KOs)

5 **LAMONT ROACH**
U.S. • 25-1-1 (10 KOs)

6 **JOE CORDINA**
U.K. • 17-1-0 (9 KOs)

7 **HECTOR LUIS GARCIA**
Dom. Rep. • 16-2-0 (10 KOs)

8 **ROBSON CONCEICAO**
Brazil • 19-2-1 (9 KOs)

9 **EDUARDO NUNEZ**
Mexico • 27-1-0 (27 KOs)

10 **ALBERT BATYRGAZIEV**
Russia • 12-0-0 (8 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C **(VACANT)**

1 **ANGELO LEO**
U.S. • 25-1-0 (12 KOs)

2 **NICK BALL**
U.K. • 21-0-1 (12 KOs)

3 **REY VARGAS**
Mexico • 36-1-1 (22 KOs)

4 **LUIS ALBERTO LOPEZ**
Mexico • 30-3-0 (17 KOs)

5 **RAFAEL ESPINOZA**
Mexico • 25-0-0 (21 KOs)

6 **BRANDON FIGUEROA**
U.S. • 25-1-1 (19 KOs)

7 **RAYMOND FORD**
U.S. • 15-1-1 (8 KOs)

8 **ROBEISY RAMIREZ**
Cuba • 14-2-0 (9 KOs)

9 **MIRCO CUELLO**
Argentina • 14-0-0 (11 KOs)

10 **BRUCE CARRINGTON**
U.S. • 13-0-0 (8 KOs)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C **NAOYA INOUE**
Japan • 28-0-0 (25 KOs)

1 **MARLON TAPALES**
Philippines • 39-4-0 (20 KOs)

2 **MURODJON AKHMADALIEV**
Uzbekistan • 12-1-0 (9 KOs)

3 **SAM GOODMAN**
Australia • 19-0-0 (8 KOs)

4 **LUIS NERY**
Mexico • 35-2-0 (27 KOs)

5 **LIAM DAVIES**
U.K. • 16-0-0 (8 KOs)

6 **ALAN PICASSO**
Mexico • 30-0-1 (16 KOs)

7 **TJ DOHENY**
Ireland • 26-5-0 (20 KOs)

8 **ELIJAH PIERCE**
U.S. • 20-2-0 (16 KOs)

9 **RAMON CARDENAS**
U.S. • 25-1-0 (14 KOs)

10 **DENNIS MCCANN**
U.K. • 16-0-1 (8 KOs)

RING RATINGS ANALYSIS THROUGH FIGHTS OF OCTOBER 26, 2024

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 JUNTO NAKATANI
Japan • 29-0-0 (22 KOs)
2 RYOSUKE NISHIDA
Japan • 9-0-0 (1 KO)
3 SEIYA TSUTSUMI
Japan • 12-0-2 (8 KOs)
4 YOSHIKI TAKEI
Japan • 10-0-0 (8 KOs)
5 TAKUMA INOUE
Japan • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
6 EMMANUEL RODRIGUEZ
Puerto Rico • 22-3-0 (13 KOs)
7 JASON MOLONEY
Australia • 27-3-0 (19 KOs)
8 ALEXANDRO SANTIAGO
Mexico • 28-4-5 (14 KOs)
9 DAVID CUELLAR
Mexico • 28-0-0 (18 KOs)
10 DAIGO HIGA
Japan • 21-3-1 (19 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

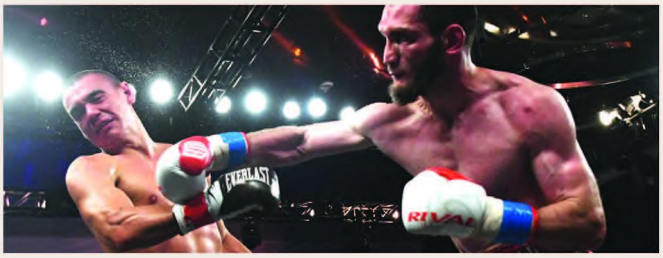
C JESSE RODRIGUEZ
U.S. • 20-0-0 (13 KOs)
1 FERNANDO MARTINEZ
Argentina • 17-0-0 (9 KOs)
2 JUAN FRANCISCO ESTRADA
Mexico • 44-4-0 (28 KOs)
3 KAZUTO IOKA
Japan • 31-3-1 (16 KOs)
4 PHUMELELE CAFU
South Africa • 11-0-3 (8 KOs)
5 KOSEI TANAKA
Japan • 20-2-0 (11 KOs)
6 CARLOS CUADRAS
Mexico • 42-5-1 (28 KOs)
7 PEDRO GUEVARA
Mexico • 42-4-1 (22 KOs)
8 ANDREW MOLONEY
Australia • 26-4-0 (16 KOs)
9 SRISAKET SOR RUNGVISAI
Thailand • 57-6-1 (46 KOs)
10 DAVID JIMENEZ
Costa Rica • 16-1-0 (11 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 SUNNY EDWARDS
U.K. • 21-1-0 (4 KOs)
2 ANGEL AYALA
Mexico • 18-0-0 (8 KOs)
3 KENSHIRO TERAJI
Japan • 24-1-0 (15 KOs)
4 SEIGO YURI AKUI
Japan • 21-2-1 (11 KOs)
5 ARTEM DALAKIAN
Ukraine • 22-1-0 (15 KOs)
6 RICARDO SANDOVAL
U.S. • 25-2-0 (18 KOs)
7 FELIX ALVARADO
Nicaragua • 41-4-0 (35 KOs)
8 ANTHONY OLASCUAGA
U.S. • 8-1-0 (6 KOs)
9 GALAL YAFAI
U.K. • 8-0-0 (6 KOs)
10 FRANCISCO RODRIGUEZ JR.
Mexico • 39-6-1 (27 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 MASAMICHI YABUKI
Japan • 17-4-0 (16 KOs)
2 SHOKICHI IWATA
Japan • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
3 SIVENATHI NONTSHINGA
S. Africa • 13-2-0 (10 KOs)
4 ADRIAN CURIEL
Mexico • 24-6-1 (5 KOs)
5 ELWIN SOTO
Mexico • 21-3-0 (13 KOs)
6 CARLOS CANIZALES
Venezuela • 27-2-1 (19 KOs)
7 CRISTIAN ARANETA
Philippines • 24-2-0 (19 KOs)
8 THANONGSAK SIMSRI
Thailand • 36-1-0 (33 KOs)
9 REGIE SUGANOB
Philippines • 15-1-0 (5 KOs)
10 ERICK ROSA
Dom. Rep. • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)



STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 OSCAR COLLAZO
U.S. • 10-0-0 (7 KOs)
2 KNOCKOUT CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 25-0-0 (9 KOs)
3 MELVIN JERUSALEM
Philippines • 23-3-0 (12 KOs)
4 PEDRO TADURAN
Philippines • 17-4-1 (13 KOs)
5 YUDAI SHIGEOKA
Japan • 9-1-0 (5 KOs)
6 GINJIRO SHIGEOKA
Japan • 11-1-0 (9 KOs)
7 PETCHMANEE CP FRESHMART
Thailand • 43-2-0 (27 KOs)
8 WILFREDO MENDEZ
Puerto Rico • 19-3-1 (6 KOs)
9 HASANBOY DUSMATOV
Uzbekistan • 6-0-0 (5 KOs)
10 DIANXING ZHU
China • 14-1-0 (12 KOs)

HOW OUR RATINGS ARE COMPILED
RECORDS PROVIDED BY BOXREC.COM

Championship vacancies can be filled in the following two ways: 1. The Ring's Nos. 1 and 2 contenders fight one another. 2. If the Nos. 1 and 2 contenders choose not to fight one another and No. 1 fights No. 3, that matchup could be for the Ring title if the Editorial Board deems No. 3 worthy.

A champion can lose his belt in six situations: 1. The Champion loses a fight in the weight class in which he is champion; 2. The Champion moves to another weight class; 3. The Champion does not schedule a fight in any weight class for 18 months, although injuries and certain other unforeseen circumstances could be taken into consideration; 4. The Champion does not schedule a fight at his championship weight for 18 months (even if he fights at another weight); 5. The Champion does not schedule a fight with a Top-5 contender from any weight class for two years; 6. The Champion retires.

The Ring Editorial Board considers input from the Ratings Panel of boxing journalists from around the world and then decides collectively what changes will be made. That applies to both the pound-for-pound and divisional ratings.

GARCIA/LARA: STEVE MARCUS; MURTAZALIEV/TSZYU: ANADOLU; (RIGHT) LUIS SINCO

Women's Ring Ratings Analysis

Through fights of November 2, 2024 • By Diego Morilla

Seniesa Estrada retired unbeaten and is undoubtedly headed to the IBHOF.

POUND-FOR-POUND: An all-time great heads for the exit unexpectedly at 32. It was quite a shocker to see a trailblazer and inaugural Ring champion leaving the game with so much still ahead of her, but it's very official and looks irreversible. Therefore, strawweight champion Seniesa Estrada abandons her lofty position as No. 4 in our pound-for-pound ratings and leaves behind her Ring belt as well.

"Only God knows how long I've been contemplating this decision," said Estrada in a statement. "Physically and mentally, I can't continue anymore." Exiting the game with a record of 26-0 with nine knockouts, Estrada owns victories over fellow champs Yokasta Valle, Tina Rupprecht, Leonela Yudica, Tenkai Tsunami and Marlen Esparza, among others, and was considered one of the sport's truest superstars with plenty of time and achievements left to be completed in her career. She is now the first women's Ring champion to retire undefeated, and it will be only a matter of time until a plaque with her name will hang on a wall in Canastota.

Our search for replacements started with the current stellar lineup of champions, with Savannah Marshall, Lauren Price, Ellie Scotney and Gabriela Alaniz becoming instant favorites. But a dark horse emerged through one of our panelist's proposals, and it quickly caught a lot of votes. And even though she had a very difficult fight ahead of her in the week of our print deadline, flyweight titlist Gabriela Fundora was picked to come in at No. 10 as one of boxing's best and as a clear favorite to lift the Ring belt from Alaniz later in the week.

With the panel in full debate mode, another proposal was made to elevate Ring inaugural bantamweight champion Dina Thorslund above Alycia Baumgardner, and it was almost unanimously accepted as well.

But it all would change less than a week later when Fundora crushed Alaniz in devastating fashion, becoming the youngest undisputed champion ever and impressing the panel enough to promote her even further. With the new vote, Fundora advanced a whopping four extra positions to become the new No. 6 in our pound-for-pound ratings.

Yokasta Valle, fresh off a win over Elizabeth Lopez Corzo with a vacant belt on the line, was also promoted one spot, while Chantelle Cameron notched a dominant win over former titlist Patricia Berghult but remained at No. 3 behind all-time greats Claressa Shields and Katie Taylor.

MIDDLEWEIGHT: There is one reason that was mentioned for Savannah Marshall to not become the new No. 10 at pound-for-pound, and that is inactivity. It's hard to blame her, since the talent pool and level of competition in the 160- and 168-pound

divisions are alarmingly shallow. With **Marshall** being our super middleweight champ and not having any meaningful fights at 160, she was removed and the entire lineup was rearranged to allow Canada's Melinda Watpool to become our new No. 1. Mapule Ngubane's defeat at the hands of Australia's Desley Robinson brought the winner to the No. 2 position as well.

JUNIOR MIDDLEWEIGHT: Notorious weight-surfer Terri Harper finally settled for the 135-pound division, a more suitable place for her terrific reach and overall power. With "Belter" gone from the top of our 154-pound ratings, it was time for Canada's Mary Spencer to return to our No. 5 position as everyone moved one notch up the ladder.

WELTERWEIGHT: With Taylor-Serrano II yet to happen at publication time, the megafight of the year so far pitted two future Hall of Famers in a bad-blood grudge match that delivered everything it promised. It was a classic duel between power and speed, and Mikaela Mayer's footwork and hand speed finally won the day against Sandy Ryan. It may have been a close affair that warrants a rematch, but for the time being, Mayer swapped places with Ryan in the 2 and 3 positions, with Natasha Jonas remaining at No. 1 in what is the tightest and most talent-laden 1-2-3 in women's boxing right now.

LIGHTWEIGHT: Another great war for pride and country resulted in a new addition to this division when Terri Harper dropped back below 135 pounds to defeat Rhiannon Dixon in a barnburner. Unrated before the bout, Harper came in at No. 3, with Dixon falling to No. 4 and Germany's Beke Bas dropping out to make room for the new entrant.

JUNIOR LIGHTWEIGHT: The cuts-induced no-contest was a terrible ending for what was shaping up as a demolition win for Ring champion Alycia Baumgardner against Delfine Persoon, but at least the inactive Baumgardner renewed her credentials as one of the game's great champions with a solid performance. The still-formidable Persoon remains at No. 1.

FEATHERWEIGHT: We had to navigate a bit of a controversy here. Germany's Nina Meinke was bleeding profusely from a cut on her forehead that could or should have caused the bout to be stopped, but it was allowed to continue while Meinke held Daniela Bermudez at every opportunity she had. Scorecards were 114-114 on one side, and then 118-110 and 119-109 for Meinke, which immediately raised questions about home cooking. Still, Meinke got enough support to move into the No. 2 position. Skye Nicolson reaffirmed her No. 1 position with a near-shutout over Raven Chapman, who remained at No. 5, but not for long. Spain's Jennifer Miranda broke in and took Chapman's spot after a victory over Teresa Almengor in the last weekend of action for this period.

POUND FOR POUND LIST

1	**CLARESSA SHIELDS** U.S. • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
2	**KATIE TAYLOR** Ireland • 23-1-0 (6 KOs)
3	**CHANTELLE CAMERON** U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
4	**AMANDA SERRANO** Puerto Rico • 47-2-1 (31 KOs)
5	**DINA THORSLUND** Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
6	**GABRIELA FUNDORA** U.S. • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
7	**YOKASTA VALLE** Costa Rica • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
8	**ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER** U.S. • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)
9	**NATASHA JONAS** U.K. • 15-2-1 (9 KOs)
10	**MIKAELA MAYER** U.S. • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)

JUNIOR FEATHERWEIGHT: Segolene Lefebvre cemented her position at No. 2 with a win over Juliana Basualdo that failed to earn her enough praise to move past Yamileth Mercado. The big winner of this period was Mikiah Kreps, who defeated one of women's boxing's toughest road warriors in Venezuela's Mayerlin Rivas to break in at No. 5.

BANTAMWEIGHT: Division champion Dina Thorslund defended her belts with a near-shutout decision win over Terumi Nuki, but the real action took place at the bottom of the list. Shurretta Metcalf was originally dropped from the ratings when her No. 5 position was grabbed by Florencia Juarez after defeating Mariana Ramirez. Metcalf faced No. 4-rated Miyo Yoshida a week later and managed to get the told-you-so upset ("managed" being key, as some felt the decision was wrong). Metcalf returned to the top 5 in Yoshida's position, relegating the Japanese fighter to No. 5 and dropping Juarez back out of the picture, at least for now.

FLYWEIGHT: An elite division deserves an elite champ, and it got one. Gabriela Alaniz was able to sneak in a few crushing blows and win a round or two, but once Gabriela "Sweet Poison" Fundora found her range, she was as deadly as we expected her to be. She's the new Ring champ, with Alaniz dropping to No. 1.

STRAWWEIGHT: All rise to salute the great Seniesa Estrada as she exits the game undefeated with a 26-0 resume and a Ring inaugural belt in her hands. With the championship now vacant, the search is on for the next big little woman in the division, and Argentina's Sol Cudos is one of those. With Jessica Basulto out of the picture due to inactivity, Cudos rode her demolishing fifth-round stoppage over Johana Zuniga to a debut as our new No. 5 in the division.

NurPhoto

SUPER MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 168 POUNDS

C SAVANNAH MARSHALL
U.K. • 13-1-0 (10 KOs)
1 FRANCHON CREWS-DEZURN
U.S. • 9-2-0 (2 KOs)
2 SHADASIA GREEN
U.S. • 14-1-0 (11 KOs)
3 LANI DANIELS
New Zealand • 11-2-2 (1 KO)
4 MARY CASAMASSA
U.S. • 5-0-0 (1 KO)
5 CITLALLI ORTIZ
Mexico • 4-1-0 (1 KO)

MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 160 POUNDS

C CLARESSA SHIELDS
U.S. • 15-0-0 (3 KOs)
1 MELINDA WATPOOL
Canada • 7-0-0 (2 KOs)
2 DESLEY ROBINSON
Australia • 8-3-0 (3 KOs)
3 MAPULE NGUBANE
S. Africa • 13-9-3 (3 KOs)
4 ADRIANA DOS SANTOS ARAUJO
Brazil • 6-2-0 (1 KO)
5 JESIKAH GUERRA
U.S. • 3-0-0 (0 KOs)

JR. MIDDLEWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 154 POUNDS

C. (VACANT)
1 FEMKE HERMANS
Belgium • 18-4-0 (7 KOs)
2 EMA KOZIN
Slovenia • 24-1-1 (12 KOs)
3 CECILIA BRAEKHUS
Norway • 38-2-1 (9 KOs)
4 OSHAE JONES
U.S. • 7-0-0 (3 KOs)
5 MARY SPENCER
Canada • 9-2-0 (6 KOs)

WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 147 POUNDS

C LAUREN PRICE
U.K. • 7-0-0 (1 KO)
1 NATASHA JONAS
U.K. • 15-2-1 (9 KOs)
2 MIKAELA MAYER
U.S. • 20-2-0 (5 KOs)
3 SANDY RYAN
U.K. • 7-2-1 (3 KOs)
4 JESSICA MCCASKILL
U.S. • 12-4-1 (5 KOs)
5 IVANA HABAZIN
Croatia • 23-5-0 (7 KOs)

JR. WELTERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 140 POUNDS

C KATIE TAYLOR
Ireland • 23-1-0 (6 KOs)
1 CHANTELLE CAMERON
U.K. • 20-1-0 (8 KOs)
2 OSHIN DERIEUW
Belgium • 19-0-0 (7 KOs)
3 CHRISTINA LINARDATOU
Greece • 14-3-0 (6 KOs)
4 SAMANTHA WORTHINGTON
U.S. • 9-0-0 (7 KOs)
5 FLORA PILI
France • 10-0-0 (1 KO)

LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 135 POUNDS

C KATIE TAYLOR
Ireland • 23-1-0 (6 KOs)
1 CAROLINE DUBOIS
U.K. • 10-0-0 (5 KOs)
2 BEATRIZ FERREIRA
Brazil • 5-0-0 (2 KOs)
3 TERRI HARPER
U.K. • 15-2-2 (6 KOs)
4 RHIANNON DIXON
U.K. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
5 MAIRA MONEO
Uruguay • 14-2-0 (3 KOs)

JR. LIGHTWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 130 POUNDS

C ALYCIA BAUMGARDNER
U.S. • 15-1-0 (7 KOs)
1 DELFINE PERSOON
Belgium • 49-3-0 (19 KOs)
2 BO MI RE SHIN
South Korea • 17-2-3 (10 KOs)
3 LEILA BEAUDOIN
Canada • 12-1-0 (1 KO)
4 JENNIFER MIRANDA
Spain • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
5 MEA MOTU
New Zealand • 20-0-0 (8 KOs)

FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 126 POUNDS

C AMANDA SERRANO
Puerto Rico • 47-2-1 (31 KOs)
1 SKYE NICOLSON
Australia • 12-0-0 (1 KO)
2 NINA MEINKE
German • 19-3-0 (4 KOs)
3 SARAH MAHFOUD
Denmark • 14-2-0 (3 KOs)
4 DANIELA BERMUDEZ
Argentina • 32-5-3 (12 KOs)
5 JENNIFER MIRANDA
Spain • 12-0-0 (1 KO)

JR. FEATHERWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 122 POUNDS

C ELLIE SCOTNEY
U.K. • 9-0-0 (0 KOs)
1 YAMILETH MERCADO
Mexico • 24-3-0 (5 KOs)
2 SEGOLENE LEFEBVRE
France • 19-1-0 (1 KO)
3 NAZARENA ROMERO
Argentina • 14-0-2 (8 KOs)
4 ERIKA CRUZ-HERNANDEZ
Mexico • 17-2-1 (3 KOs)
5 MIKIAH KREPS
U.S. • 9-0-0 (3 KOs)

BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 118 POUNDS

C DINA THORSLUND
Denmark • 23-0-0 (9 KOs)
1 YULIHAN LUNA AVILA
Mexico • 27-4-1 (4 KOs)
2 CHERNEKA JOHNSON
Australia • 16-2-0 (6 KOs)
3 NINA HUGHES
U.K. • 6-1-0 (2 KOs)
4 SHURRETTA METCALF
U.S. • 14-4-1 (2 KOs)
5 MIYO YOSHIDA
Japan • 17-5-0 (0 KOs)

JR. BANTAMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 115 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 MIZUKI HIRUTA
Japan • 6-0-0 (2 KOs)
2 CARLA MERINO
Argentina • 15-2-0 (3 KOs)
3 GINNY FUCHS
U.S. • 4-0-0 (1 KO)
4 ADELAIDA RUIZ
U.S. • 16-1-1 (8 KOs)
5 CLARA LESCURAT
Argentina • 11-0-0 (4 KOs)

FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 112 POUNDS

C GABRIELA FUNDORA
U.S. • 15-0-0 (7 KOs)
1 GABRIELA ALANIZ
Argentina • 15-2-0 (6 KOs)
2 MARLEN ESPARZA
U.S. • 14-2-0 (1 KO)
3 KENIA ENRIQUEZ
Mexico • 28-1-0 (11 KOs)
4 ARELY MUCINO
Mexico • 32-4-2 (11 KOs)
5 IBETH ZAMORA
Mexico • 33-8-0 (13 KOs)

JR. FLYWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 108 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 JESSICA NERY PLATA
Mexico • 30-2-0 (3 KOs)
2 EVELIN BERMUDEZ
Argentina • 20-1-1 (7 KOs)
3 KIM CLAVEL
Canada • 19-2-0 (3 KOs)
4 LEONELA YUDICA
Argentina • 20-2-3 (1 KO)
5 TANIA ENRIQUEZ
Mexico • 21-1-0 (10 KOs)

STRAWWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 105 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 YOKASTA VALLE
Costa Rica • 32-3-0 (10 KOs)
2 SARAH BORMANN
Germany • 18-1-0 (7 KOs)
3 ANABEL ORTIZ
Mexico • 34-6-0 (4 KOs)
4 YADIRA BUSTILLOS
U.S. • 10-1-0 (1 KO)
5 SOL CUDOS
Argentina • 9-0-2 (3 KOs)

ATOMWEIGHTS
WEIGHT LIMIT: 102 POUNDS

C (VACANT)
1 TINA RUPPRECHT
Germany • 13-1-1 (3 KOs)
2 ERI MATSUDA
Japan • 7-1-1 (1 KO)
3 SUMIRE YAMANAKA
Japan • 8-0-0 (3 KOs)
4 YUKO KUROKI
Japan • 23-8-2 (10 KOs)
5 FABIANA BYTYQI
Czech Republic • 21-1-2 (5 KOs)

BACK INTO THE FIRE

AFTER AN EPIC FIRST ENCOUNTER THAT MADE HEAVYWEIGHT HISTORY, THE OLEKSANDR USYK-TYSON FURY REMATCH GOES EVEN FURTHER AS A BATTLE OF PROOF VS. REDEMPTION

By Nigel Collins

Fayez Nureldine

At a time when armed conflict is rampant, boxing, often the whipping boy of the sports world, can set a far greater example of how to settle differences in a sane manner. Yes, boxing is dangerous, we all know that, and it appeals to a primeval need for violence. But at times it can also be glorious, so let's hope the hottest heavyweight rematch in some time lives up to its potential. Except for the boxers, the best way to fight is vicariously.

As we count down the days to Oleksandr Usyk-Tyson Fury II, let's scrutinize their first fight. See what we can find. Why did Usyk win? Why did Fury lose? And could the second fight produce a different result?

The rematch will be held at the same venue as last time, the Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on December 21, 2024. It's the sort of fight you want to see, but you also keep your fingers crossed. Another injury postponement would be unbearable.

A brief account of the first Usyk-Fury fight might at least provide clues to some of the queries. After all, it's been the talk of the boxing world ever since the ring announcer proclaimed that the southpaw Usyk had won a 12-round split decision and the undisputed heavyweight championship.

The biggest head-scratcher was Fury's unexpected fade over the second half of the fight. What a stunning turnaround. He had boxed well, worked the body, jolted Usyk with a right uppercut in the sixth round and was ahead on the official scorecards going into the eighth. Then, suddenly, in the ninth round, The Gypsy King fell apart like a cheap watch.

When Usyk's left hook slammed home, Fury knew he was in trouble, maybe in more trouble than ever before. Usyk seized the moment and unleashed a fusillade of punches, most of which landed on Fury's head and sent him floundering around the ring like an octopus on ice skates.

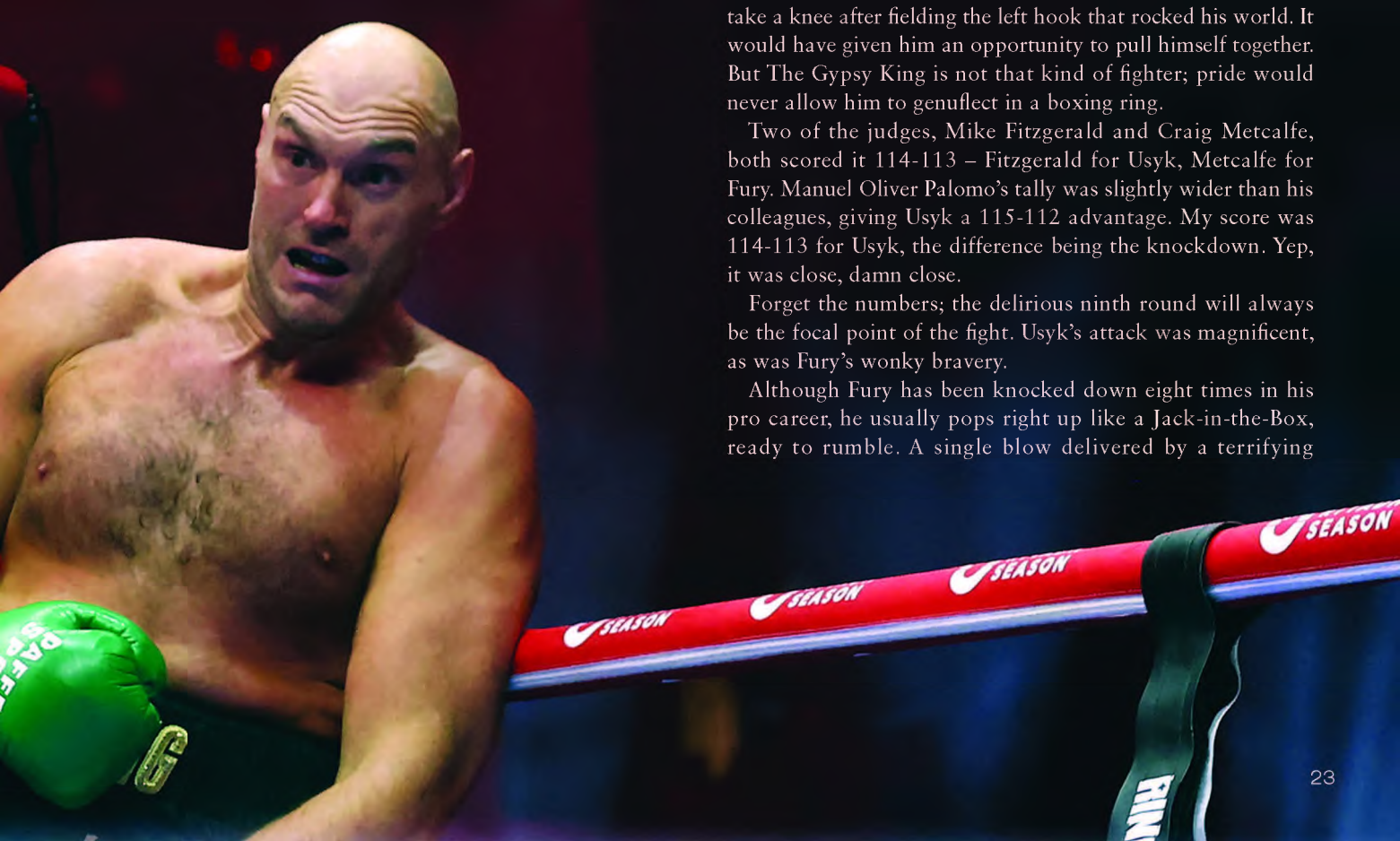
One of Usyk's wallops propelled The Gypsy King into the ropes, which prevented Fury from going down or flying out of the ring like a human cannonball. Technically, referee Mark Nelson could have called it a knockdown, and a few seconds later when Fury sagged to the canvas in a corner, Nelson gave him an eight count. Fury was in dire trouble but somehow managed to finish the round on his feet.

One thing that could have helped Fury would have been to take a knee after fielding the left hook that rocked his world. It would have given him an opportunity to pull himself together. But The Gypsy King is not that kind of fighter; pride would never allow him to genuflect in a boxing ring.

Two of the judges, Mike Fitzgerald and Craig Metcalfe, both scored it 114-113 – Fitzgerald for Usyk, Metcalfe for Fury. Manuel Oliver Palomo's tally was slightly wider than his colleagues, giving Usyk a 115-112 advantage. My score was 114-113 for Usyk, the difference being the knockdown. Yep, it was close, damn close.

Forget the numbers; the delirious ninth round will always be the focal point of the fight. Usyk's attack was magnificent, as was Fury's wonky bravery.

Although Fury has been knocked down eight times in his pro career, he usually pops right up like a Jack-in-the-Box, ready to rumble. A single blow delivered by a terrifying



puncher like Deontay Wilder is different from a prolonged whipping by a fighter like Usyk. A one-punch knockdown or knockout is over swiftly, but punch after punch for an extended period can be a career-killer.

After 36 pro fights, there's a strong possibility that the 36-year-old Fury is not the fighter he used to be. Usyk was the first elite-level opponent he's fought since the final Deontay Wilder thriller in October 2021. Fury's three opponents after the Wilder trilogy were Dillian Whyte, Derek Chisora and Francis Ngannou, an MMA fighter.

In roughly the same time span, Usyk came off the floor to knock out Daniel Dubois and won two 12-rounders with Anthony Joshua, the first unanimous and the second a split. Compare that schedule to The Gypsy King's coronation at Wembley against shopworn Whyte, his sloppy torture of Chisora in Tottenham and a survival test against a bloke having his very first boxing match.

The lack of a meaningful fight in three years did wonders for Fury's bank balance and ego. It is also part of the reason why he lost. Had Fury fought at least one legitimate contender – Michael Hunter, maybe – it would have kept him sharp and better prepared to tackle a boxer of Usyk's caliber.

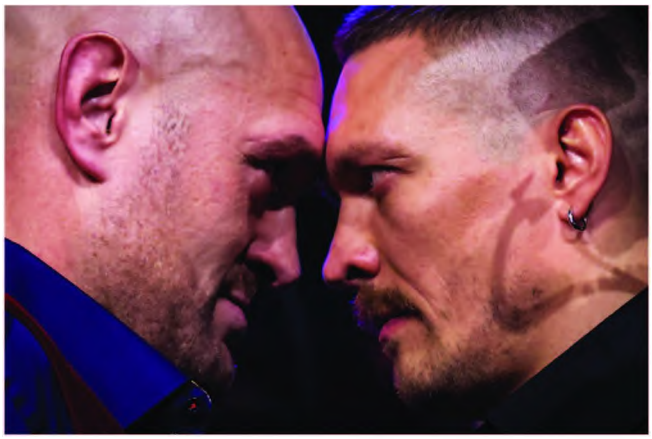
Top Rank President Todd DuBoef also thought Tyson's self-esteem got in the way of victory.

"In those middle rounds it felt like Fury was just teeing off on [Usyk], and I think he just got a little lackadaisical and confident." DuBoef told Sky Sports. "I think he learned a lesson, and it was a hard lesson. I think [Fury's] personality, the way he is in the ring, is just his character. But I think he's not going to take things for granted [in the rematch]. But I also believe that [Usyk] is going to be better this time, because he has more confidence."

"I wonder how much that first fight took out of both of them," said BoxingScene's Tris Dixon. "Usyk's high amateur mileage will likely catch up to him at some point in the near future, the same way Fury's fast living might catch up with him."

Like Max Schmeling before his first fight with Joe Louis, Usyk "saw something" he believes he can take advantage of in the return bout.

"From the last fight with Tyson Fury, I learned a lot about him, a lot of things I saw in the fight I didn't see on TV," said Usyk, flaunting his gap-tooth smile.



Fury was more introspective. "It was a close fight, you know. I thought I did enough, but I can't judge a fight while I'm boxing it," he said. "I don't think I could have done any better. Maybe if someone said before the last round, 'You are down, go out and finish it,' I would have done it. But everybody in the corner believed we were up. I tried me best and it was what it was. I can't complain about it. We are not young kids anymore. We're at the end of our careers."

He uttered the last two sentences matter-of-factly. A weary warrior speaking the truth and acknowledging that the end is near.

Many rematches are won by the boxer who prevailed in the first bout, and Usyk is certain he's going to do likewise.

First time around, the Ukrainian won because he was a penny smarter. You never know. It might be The Gypsy King's turn this time. I doubt he will be the betting favorite, but when Fury calls himself "a special fighter," he's not wrong. And special fighters do special things. Right? Without the ninth-round beatdown, he probably would have won. But "probably" has never won a fight.

It's been said that a great fighter usually has one final great fight left in him. Maybe the rematch with Usyk will be Fury's. Maybe The Gypsy King has already had his.

If Usyk has a weakness, it's body punches. When Daniel Dubois knocked him down, referee Luis Pabon blew the call. It wasn't a low blow; the punch landed on the waistband, and judging by the agony on Oleksandr's face, it was a doozy.

When Usyk stood up and indicated he was ready to continue, for some perplexing reason Pabon wouldn't let him. This happened several times before the ref allowed the fight to resume, giving Usyk extra time to recover, even if he didn't want it. We will never know what would have happened if Pabon had made the correct call.

It would be stupid to demean Usyk's ability to endure body shots. He clearly can, and what happened in his fight with Dubois was probably a one-off. It's just that sometimes you get a hunch you can't shake.

"I love the rematch," said Dixon. "It's clear they are the two best in the world and probably the two best of this era."

U.K. boxing writer James Slater won't be satisfied until both fighters are in the ring and the opening bell sounds. "While I do hope there is no last-minute pull-out by Fury," said Slater, "this is a real possibility."

Perish the thought. We all want to see the Usyk-Fury rivalry convincingly settled, preferably by knockout. TBRB

DANIEL LEAL / Contributor

Rematch Revenge

Boxing's heavyweight division has had more than its share of U-turns. As we await the second Usyk-Fury fight, here are some examples, in chronological order, of heavyweight losers becoming winners.

Max Schmeling vs. Jack Sharkey
June 12, 1930

When Gene Tunney retired in 1926, an elimination was ordered by the National Boxing Association (a forerunner of the WBA) and New York Commission. The two finalists were Schmeling and Sharkey. By the fourth round, Schmeling was writhing in pain on the canvas, victim of an alleged low blow. Referee Jim Crowley was not in position to see the punch, so he took the word of one of the judges and awarded Schmeling the title via disqualification. There was a whiff of brimstone in this one and the next.

Jack Sharkey vs. Max Schmeling
June 21, 1932

After 15 rather uneventful rounds, Sharkey won a controversial decision and the world title. The Ring editor Nat Fleischer disagreed with the verdict and wrote, "Most of the effective work was accomplished by Schmeling who carried the fight to Sharkey, maneuvered his opponent cleverly, and landed the best punches of the few that really meant something."

Floyd Patterson vs. Ingemar Johansson
June 26, 1959

The Swede flabbergasted the crowd at Yankee Stadium when he unleashed his "Hammer of Thor" in the third round, knocking down champion Patterson seven times before referee Ruby Goldstein stopped the rout at 2:03 of the round.

Ingemar Johansson vs. Floyd Patterson
June 20, 1960

Patterson became the first heavyweight champion to regain the title when he knocked out Johansson with one spectacular left hook at 1:51 of the fifth round.

Muhammad Ali vs. Leon Spinks
February 15, 1978

An aging Ali needed a relatively easy defense after a grueling battle with Earnie Shavers. His team selected Spinks, who had won the light heavyweight gold medal in the 1976 Olympics but had only seven pro fights. In a startling upset, Leon won a split decision to claim the title. The electrifying bout was The Ring's Fight of the Year and the 15th round was the Round of the Year.

Leon Spinks vs. Muhammad Ali
September 15, 1978

The rematch was a massive moneymaker. There were 63,350 inside the New Orleans Superdome and approximately 90 million around the world watched on television. Ali achieved an easy 15-round unanimous decision and won the title for the third and final time.

Lennox Lewis vs. Oliver McCall
September 24, 1994

Granite-jawed McCall had won nine of his previous 10 fights but was better known as Mike Tyson's sparring partner. He floored Lewis with a right in the second round, and although Lennox was back on his feet by the count of six, referee José Guadalupe Garcia ruled the Englishman unfit to continue and stopped the fight at the 0:31 mark of the second round.

Oliver McCall vs. Lennox Lewis
February 7, 1997

McCall had recently been in rehab and should not have been in the ring that night. He had lost the title in his second defense, so the rematch with Lewis was for the vacant WBC strap. McCall refused to go to his corner after the third round and just walked around the ring. He only threw two punches in the fourth. Referee Mills Lane took him by the arm and walked McCall to his corner, where Oliver began crying. Realizing McCall was having a nervous breakdown, Lane stopped the fight 55 seconds in the fifth and awarded Lewis a TKO victory.

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THE SHADOWBOXER

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION OLEKSANDR USYK HAS DEFEATED EVERY OPPONENT AND DOUBTER PUT IN FRONT OF HIM, BUT HE SAYS THAT'S NOTHING COMPARED TO THE BATTLE WITHIN

by Brin-Jonathan Butler

Oleksandr Usyk, the first undisputed heavyweight champion in 24 years, began his boxing journey 22 years ago, at age 15. In 2019, he entered the division where Tyson Fury, Deontay Wilder and Anthony Joshua – the vanguard of a new, golden era of towering, undefeated heavyweights – loomed before him. Only six fights into his heavyweight career, against the odds and many predictions, Usyk is the last man standing. And yet, with 372 fights as an amateur and professional – during which he also became an Olympic champion and undisputed cruiserweight champion – he confessed that no opponent he has ever faced challenged him more than Oleksandr Usyk himself.

Over the last decade, there has been some considerable whiplash in boxing's glamor division. In 2015, Wladimir Klitschko was dethroned by unanimous decision in an uninspiring performance against heavy underdog Fury. Fury quickly spun out of control and for three years gained a reputation as a trainwreck: ballooning to 400 pounds, homophobic and sexist rants, monumental struggles with depression, injuries and doping issues. In 2017, during Fury's absence, Anthony Joshua's shining victory against a motivated and rejuvenated Klitschko symbolized, for many, a coronation of the new era's true defining champion. Only two years later, Andy Ruiz would audition for his generation's role of Buster Douglas by knocking out Joshua in Madison Square Garden in one of heavyweight boxing's greatest upsets. Meanwhile, beginning at the end of 2019, Fury had staged one of boxing's greatest comebacks of all time and was engaged with Deontay Wilder in a trilogy for the ages, waged across three years. During this mythic battle, recency bias likely playing a significant role, as Fury was frequently being touted by many experts and members of the public as perhaps the most formidable heavyweight fighter ever. Oleksandr Usyk responded by outclassing Anthony Joshua in back-to-back victories, following those up by stopping Daniel Dubois in the ninth round with a jab.

Nine months later, as an underdog, Usyk became the first boxer to defeat Tyson Fury, notching a capstone victory for his career.

Wherever Usyk's achievements might place him in the history of boxing, we would do well to remember that Usyk has fought all of six fights as a heavyweight thus far in his career. Despite being a month from his 38th birthday, Usyk has not indicated an intention to walk away from the sport. Roy Jones Jr. was only 34 after he won a piece of the heavyweight crown against John Ruiz. What might Jones' legacy have been had he walked away after that victory instead of remaining for another 20 years?

Then again, what could an iconic knockout of Fury in their mythic rematch on December 21 add to Usyk's glistening legacy? The Ring spoke to him as he prepared for the next chapter.

The Ring: How are you feeling about this upcoming rematch with Fury? Will it be more difficult or easier?
Usyk: (in English) I feel good. I don't think about rematch. My focus is all on my preparation and all on my camp.

The Ring: Did it go as you thought it would the first time, according to your game plan?
Usyk: (laughs) Oh, yes. My game plan will be different, because it will be new fight. I'll be more aggressive. I'll be more fast. It will be a new fight, you know? The first fight, it wasn't that fast.

The Ring: In Round 9, I think it was the worst that Fury was ever injured when you clipped him. I counted the referee allowing the ropes to keep him up five times. You were about to finish him off and the referee jumped in to protect Fury. What was that moment like for you, where

Illustration by Chris Wormell

you could've had an iconic knockout and it seemed taken?

Usyk: Listen, boxing is hard sport. I have big respect for my opponent, Tyson Fury. Maybe the referee helped Fury, because my last punch can be the last. Maybe, I don't know.

I think Fury is husband, he is father, he's good man. Yeah, Tyson Fury, a lot of talk, but it's not my problem and it's not our people's problem. Maybe it's a problem and maybe it's not a problem for only Fury. But a lot of people talk, "Hey, this referee is bad," blah, blah, blah ... No. The referee [is doing his job]. I don't have questions for referee. I win. Thank you, God. We win, my team win. Thank you, God. All good. Now we have a new preparation.

The Ring: You've only had six fights as a heavyweight so far in your career. Is it strange to already be talked about as the greatest heavyweight of your era, and some people saying one of the greatest heavyweights of all time with just six fights?

Usyk: It doesn't matter how many fights you have. It only matters how you do your job.

The Ring: You don't think longevity is important in a great champion?

Usyk: (switches to Ukrainian) For me, it's important to remain who I am. If I am champion of the world, glory to God. If I am not champion of the world, then also glory to God. For me, it's important to be a human. I'm not going to be good to everyone; the most important thing is that I am good for my family. A lot of people say that it's for legacy – they want to do this and they want to do that. I box solely for myself because I like it. But right now, I box for my country, for Ukraine, for the ones closest to me, for the soldiers who defend our country, and for those who like me and for those who don't like me too.

The Ring: Is it more of a motivation to make you a better fighter or is it a pressure that you carry?

Usyk: Listen, today I have motivation, tomorrow I don't have motivation, but every day and every time, I have discipline. Motivation is different for everyone. Everyone seeks some kind of motivation, forgetting that when the sun rises, you have to move. The deer runs away from the tiger and the tiger catches up with the deer. Life is simple.

"Everyone seeks some kind of motivation, forgetting that when the sun rises, you have to move. The deer runs away from the tiger and the tiger catches up with the deer. Life is simple."

The Ring: Do you think this will be your last fight if you beat or knock out Fury in the coming rematch? Do you have anything more to prove or desire to continue fighting after this?

Usyk: Not if, but when! There is a lot to prove to myself, most importantly. There is a lot to prove. This is a regimen. It's waking up in the morning when everyone is still asleep. When the road is still dark. That's when you go hard. When you arrive at the gym, you work yourself to exhaustion. When it gets hard, you run and say to yourself, "Hey Sashko, you can do it. So run, brother."

In order for the sports car to be always running, it has to be driven. It cannot stand somewhere in a garage. It should be driven. It should be lubricated. You fix it a bit by changing tires or some other parts in order for the sports car to run/work properly, and a nice sports car becomes better with age. It becomes more expensive and more precious and becomes unbelievably beautiful.

The Ring: But at a certain point it stops getting better. How does that feel? You're 37. I've interviewed Roy Jones and Mike Tyson, many great boxers at a certain point in their careers. This is a very demanding and dangerous profession. Do you think about the end of your career at this point?

Usyk: It's not hard yet, but as soon as I receive a sign from God that it is hard for me and I don't want to wake up at 5 o'clock in the morning anymore, I'll immediately understand, for I am not a greedy person. I have brains. I have a lot of kids (he and his wife, Yekaterina, have two sons and two daughters). And when I receive the sign from God saying, "Sasha, it's enough," I will certainly tell the world about it and I will start working in a different direction.

The Ring: I interviewed Roy Jones before his career was over and he said the same thing. God would tell him when his career was over. During an examination of his brain, God would produce a problem as a sign he should stop. I asked him a question I would like to ask you: Has God ever told you no?

Usyk: Yes, sometimes he did not let me get or did not give me something that I wanted. But after hard work and better understanding, he lets me get what I want.

I will give you a good example. When I went to my first Olympic games, I was about 20, 21 years old. The first fight I won, but I lost the semifinals. I know for sure if back then I became the Olympic champion right away, you would never see me again and we would not be talking right now and I would not be giving this interview. But God has stopped me and made me go a different way. I started working on

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myself even harder. I started studying myself and understood the difference between life and boxing. And the next Olympic games, because of my hard work, I won the final fight against the same Italian guy that I lost in the previous Olympic games.

For the first undisputed cruiserweight fight, we were supposed to fight in Saudi Arabia, but something went wrong. But we came back six years later, more prepared, and in a better weight class, a royal weight.

The Ring: You took up the sport at 15 years old. By my count, you've had 372 fights, amateur and professional combined. I wonder if what you fought for when you began as a boxer at 15 has changed and what it represents for you now.

Usyk: No, I continue to fight because I like it. In the beginning, I was fighting to prove the people who didn't believe in me wrong. But now, I am fighting for those who believe in me.

Usyk's faith and courage enable him to thrive in an era of giant heavyweights.

The Ring: Is it more motivating to have people not believe in you than to have people believe in you and feel their support?

Usyk: Both, both! Those who don't believe in me motivate me the most.

The Ring: How has the war in Ukraine impacted your approach to your boxing career?

Usyk: The war in Ukraine has changed me completely as a person.

The Ring: May I ask in what ways?

Usyk: The war has opened up everyone, it has shown who is who. Who is lying, who is telling the truth, who is a good person, who is not – the war showed everyone's cards. Who was hiding behind justice turned out to be a charlatan. Some who previously seemed weak turned out to be unbelievably brave.

As for me, the war has changed me inside completely as a man. I changed. I became stronger. I don't believe people as much, even though I continue trusting them. I started to love people even more. I became stronger here (points to his head).

I wanted to say something else, even though it may sound baseless. I was never afraid of death, because it is going to come anyway. But now, I am not afraid of death at all, because it is going to come when it needs to come. When God will allow death to come to me, it will come.

The Ring: Ukraine represents the role of an underdog against Russia, a smaller place fighting a large and powerful adversary. Do you identify with that? You have spoken many times about being underestimated by the public or critics and your opponents.

Usyk earned an edge on the scorecards with his fierce ninth-round assault.

Do you get great motivation from your country and from the spirit of your country that it's demonstrated to influence how you fight? Also in how you represent it?

Usyk: I am Ukraine.

The Ring: Do you recognize that you are inspiring many people around the world, not just your countrymen, with your courage and also how you symbolize your country's courage?

Usyk: I am very thankful that God has allowed me to be born in Ukraine and be a Ukrainian Orthodox Christian, and be a Ukrainian citizen.

The Ring: What boxers when you began boxing influenced your style? Were there any boxers who you emulated?

Usyk: I respect Muhammad Ali. Not only for his boxing, but for his positions. I respect him for how he fought for his rights and for the rights of his people, for himself and for life. He fought the same way we are fighting right now. And we will prevail because truth is behind us. And where there is truth, there is light.

I like Evander Holyfield as well. With his perseverance, when something went wrong, his mom was always supporting him, and because of that he has achieved the highest results in his life.

Manny Pacquiao, an unbelievable boxer who believed in himself and had an unbelievable path. I started following him when he was already a world champion. I was looking at him and was thinking to myself how unbelievable. Such a small person is doing such big things.

The Ring: So many boxers create controversy to sell their fights. You have become almost famous for refusing to trash talk or be disrespectful to your opponents. Where does that instinct come from?

Usyk: This was the way my father raised me. If you run your mouth, you're not doing enough. I am an Orthodox Christian; I can't go around offending people if they do not deserve it. I'm just going to go fight in the ring, and that's all. How is trash talk going to help me? I will become weaker. I will only show that I can box. I never did this (trash talk), and don't plan on it. My kids look at me and repeat what I do. Imagine if one of my children goes to school and starts offending someone. What's that? That is not how you raise a child. That's not how a man behaves. I will say it this way: Manners make the man.

The Ring: Something I read in an interview with you that I found interesting: You mentioned after you won the Olympic games in 2012 that you spoke with your father for the last time and he said that he loved you. You said that was the first time he said that to you. You also said that with your own children, you tell them you love them every day. If on some level your father withholding saying he loved you motivated you to work harder to get where you are, what inspired you to act differently with your own children?

Usyk: Because I know when I tell my children every day that I believe in them. They are different. They have a different life. They have bread, they have shoes, they have education, but I didn't have this. I didn't have bread. I was hungry. I didn't have shoes to walk to school. I was different. I went a different way, and they are going in a completely different way, but I see that my love and

Nick Potts - PA Images

words are motivating them to study, to train for life. They are different. And I have to raise them differently.

I waited! I waited for my father to say those words. I waited for my father to say those words, but he didn't say it. And when he didn't say it, it motivated me even more. But that's the way he was, and for that I love him and I keep loving him for it. But I told myself that I would be a different dad. I just said it, and when I say something, I am not lying.

The Ring: Do you believe if your father told you every day that he loved you, as you tell your own children, your life would have been different?
Usyk: It would be more motivating.

The Ring: Do you think most boxers are motivated by love, fear, or perhaps anger? I think the public imagines that most boxers have had difficult lives and it motivates them to be stronger. You're saying that love in fact is the strongest motivator for you?
Usyk: Of course, love is the strongest motivator. One hundred percent, love is the strongest motivator. And if that doesn't help, you need more love.

The Ring: How difficult has it been for you to fight so often as a road warrior, in front of so many of your opponents' hometown crowds cheering them on? Or has it helped you in some way?
Usyk: It is not difficult for me at all, because when I come into the territory of my opponent, that territory becomes mine. But I don't capture this territory. I strictly make the people happy and then go home.

The Ring: Is there a moment of adversity in your 372 fights as an amateur and professional that you've had that stands out for you?
Usyk: Yes, it was when my father died. I wanted to quit boxing. But – I don't remember who – one of my relatives told me that he wouldn't like that and that he is watching you.

The Ring: Did your father like that you became a boxer? As a soldier, what was his opinion of boxing?
Usyk: He really liked the sport and he told me that I would become champion of the world, and I thought, "What is he talking about? How can I become world champion or professional?"

The Ring: What did you think you would become? If you didn't believe your father that you would become a world champion, what did you think you could accomplish?
Usyk: My dad believed in me, but I didn't believe in myself.

The Ring: How were you able to do it? Muhammad Ali said even before he believed he was the greatest, he said he was.
Usyk: Yes, when I started to box, maybe after six months or a year, he told me, "Try, and you will succeed." And when I started to have success, then I started to believe in myself, not only because he told me … I started to dream, "Will I become European champion? Will I be Olympic champion? Will I become world champion? Then after that, I will become a professional!" After, I believed all of this, but initially I told him, "Are you joking? I'm going to play soccer." I wanted to prove it to him that I can do it.

The Ring: In *War and Peace*, Tolstoy talks about how in war, most people focus on the size of an army. But he says the true factor in victory is the spirit of the troops. You're very famous for fighting somebody like Fury who towers over you and is much heavier and larger than you. Do you agree that the spirit of a boxer is at least as important as his skill, strength and speed?
Usyk: Size doesn't matter. If size mattered, the king of the animals would be the elephant. Not always does a bigger country win over a smaller country.

The Ring: When I watched your fight with Fury, it was the first time I saw Fury have fear. It seemed his best chance to beat you was to come forward and risk the danger. He was not willing to fight that way. Did you sense or see that fear from Fury?
Usyk: Don't be afraid. I will not leave you alone, my friend.

I didn't see it, but I felt it.

The Ring: On some level do you see fighting as a game of chess with your opponents? Are you out-thinking them even more than your will power, and is what you're fighting for stronger than your opponents?
Usyk: Both. For many years I've said that I can only [outsmart opponents] in the ring.

The Ring: What advice would you give a young boxer who watches you, now that you've inspired them to start boxing? How can they have a chance of following in your footsteps?
Usyk: Think about the job and not the big money. I imagined, when I was boxing in the Olympics, I needed the gold medal. Even if it was made out of wood, the meaning was still first place. That's gold, right? Even if they gave me a wooden medal, I would be satisfied. Imagine that your work is above all else. You will receive the dividends after the work is done. Only this should be in your head. Not how much you receive; it's how much you achieve.

The Ring: How important has your reputation as a man outside the ring been, compared to your achievements inside the ring?
Usyk: Your reputation is very important both inside and outside of the ring.

The Ring: Why do you think Mike Tyson at 58 years old, fighting a YouTube star like Jake Paul, is getting more attention than any of the great boxers fighting today from the public?
Usyk: Because we are uneducated people.

RIYADH SEASON
RING FIRE
UKRAINA
RTFIGHT
GYPSY

The Ring: Do you in any way fight to bring more people to the sport, to fall in love with the sport?
Usyk: One of my goals is to change people's attitude towards boxing. Boxing is a very highly intelligent sport. It isn't just a fight between two guys. It's a very smart sport where you have to understand, not just to wave your fists around.

The Ring: Is there anyone from the past who you've dreamed about fighting?
Usyk: I wouldn't want to fight him, I would want to sit down with him and thank him for his influence in boxing: Muhammad Ali.

The Ring: Did you ever meet Ali?
Usyk: I saw him at the Olympic games in 2012. When I saw him, my legs started to shake. When I saw him at the opening ceremony, I understood right away that this was a message for me that I will become Olympic champion.

The Ring: If you were not Ukrainian, how would your career have been different? How much has it meant to you being a Ukrainian boxer and champion?
Usyk: We cannot talk about this. God sent me to be born IN Ukraine and to glorify it and to carry the flag. And that's what I will do.

The Ring: I read a quote of yours where you talked about your career from the perspective of the samurai. It was not the destination that was important, but the path that you're on which was most important. You had so many people tell you should never try boxing. They said you could not become an Olympic champion. You shouldn't leave the cruiserweight division to become a heavyweight.

Usyk has already forged a hall-of-fame-worthy career but remains motivated and disciplined at 37.

You met such resistance. Where did the courage come to not listen and achieve all the things you have so far in your career?
Usyk: I believe in God. I know he's there. Some believe in him, but I know he is there and he tells me through messages through my thoughts to just go, and this is your plan. People are afraid to make the first step. They are afraid of the unknown. They are afraid of condemnation. I am not afraid of this. I don't care what they say about me. This is my way. Don't go with the flow! Create the flow!

The Ring: Who was the best opponent that you have fought so far? Perhaps if you could give me the top three.
Usyk: Oleksandr Usyk. Oleksandr Usyk. Oleksandr Usyk.

The Ring: Fighting yourself, you mean?
Usyk: Yes, of course! I am a very hard opponent.

The Ring: Fighting your shadow, in a sense? Has that shadow gotten stronger as you've moved along your career, or are you getting better against him?
Usyk: My entire life, I have been fighting my internal self that tells me to stop – "Don't do it. Take a rest. You have a lot on your plate." Stop again; rest more – but I tell the voice, "I don't know you. Get out of here. I am building my life."

Today, I had a very hard training session. (Usyk was training in Valencia, Spain, at the time.) I had to run for 45 minutes at a high pace. My heart rate was 180 bpm. And when I looked at my pulse, my heart rate was in the red zone – 180-190 bpm. And you know what I was thinking? I didn't think to stop. I thought that next to me running is my team, and even if I pass out, my team will come and save me.

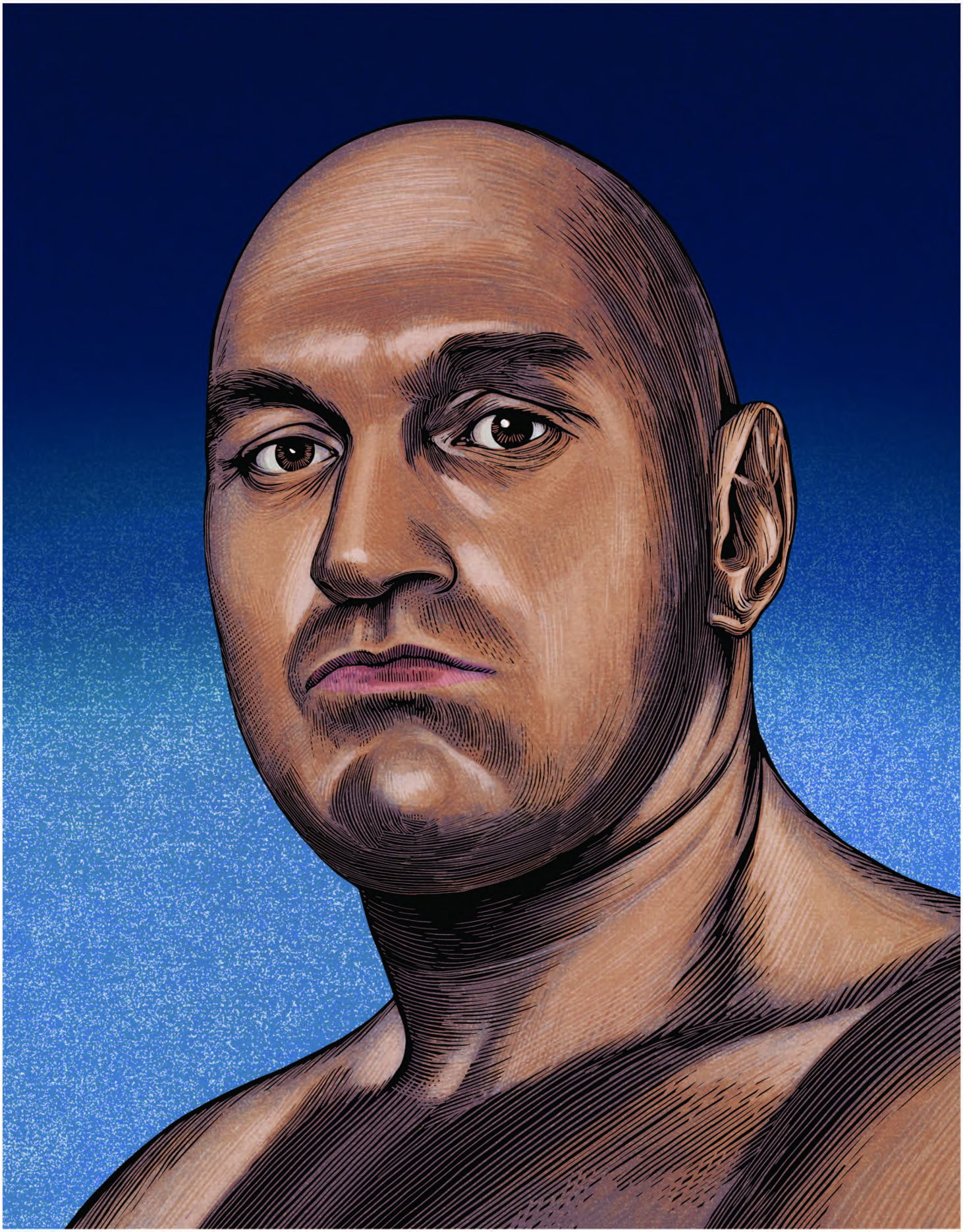
The Ring: You mentioned Muhammad Ali as your favorite boxer. But there are two legacies with Ali. There is the greatness, but also him staying in the sport too long and representing a cautionary tale. Can you learn from him and leave the sport at the right time so your legacy includes not getting hurt?
Usyk: God gave him this test in order to see if he would be faithful to continue. Would he continue to believe in God or not? Yes, of course, boxing contributed to his disease, but God allows us to face these tests. God gave him this test to test his belief in God.

The Ring: I just meant we all admire your courage and any boxer's courage to fight. It takes enormous courage to do what you're doing. But at a certain point, it might require even more courage to stop. You're 37. Many boxers stay too long. Do you think you'll have enough courage to leave at the right time?
Usyk: I am brave. I have a date in mind for when I will finish my career.

The Ring: Is it your date or God's date?
Usyk: It's my date. God will give me the opportunity to fight to this date.

The Ring: My last question is about the stuffed animal your daughter gave you – Eeyore (a donkey from the Winnie-the-Pooh children's books). She said that it makes you more powerful. Do you consider Eeyore a performance-enhancing drug?
Usyk: I think about learning to become a referee. I want to work as a referee. This is the love of my children. This is a performance-enhancing drug. This the strongest performance-enhancing drug there is. And Maria (one of his two daughters) is giving me another one. OK, I have to go to church now. RING

Mykhailo Krasiuk translated for Usyk during the interview. Roman Jablonskyj provided further translation of the recording. The Ring greatly appreciates their contributions.



THE CHALLENGER WHO STILL BELIEVES HE'S CHAMPION

IN MAY, TYSON FURY LOST FOR THE FIRST TIME IN HIS CAREER WHEN HE SUFFERED A NARROW POINTS LOSS TO OLEKSANDR USYK. NOW, AHEAD OF THEIR COLOSSAL REMATCH, "THE GYPSY KING" PROMISES A VERY DIFFERENT APPROACH TO BUSINESS

By Tom Gray

Former two-time heavyweight champion Tyson Fury owes much of his success to being a nonconformist. Many said he wouldn't become heavyweight champion, and he did. No fighter had survived a flush right-hand knockdown from Deontay Wilder, and he did. Everyone said Fury couldn't regain the championship following a two-year layoff that saw him balloon up to 400 pounds, and he did.

It therefore comes as no surprise that Fury remains a nonconformist after suffering the first loss of a 16-year professional career. Most fans and experts believe that Oleksandr Usyk edged Fury in Riyadh on May 18 in the first undisputed heavyweight championship bout for almost a quarter of a century. It was an exceptional fight and both men fought brilliantly, but it was Usyk who exited the Kingdom Arena with all the gold.

Fury (34-1-1, 24 KOs) has scored the fight innumerable times and does not agree with the judges or anyone else who believes that The Gypsy King deserved to be dethroned. And this is not a case of fighter ego. In an interview that lasted close to 40 minutes, the enigmatic Englishman couldn't have been more resolute in his opinions of the scoring. I looked for signs of bluff and found none.

Is Fury fooling himself? That remains to be seen when he squares off with Usyk again at the very same venue on December 21. Boxing politics have dictated that the rematch is not for the undisputed title, with the IBF finding a way to make a champion out of Daniel Dubois, whom Usyk defeated last year. Politics be damned – Usyk vs. Fury 2 is for the heavyweight championship of the world.

Having scored narrowly for Usyk from ringside, my instincts had told me that the brilliant Ukrainian southpaw would start as a big favorite in the rematch. However, after speaking with Fury at length, I came away a lot less convinced. In the 10 years of conducting interviews with him, I've never seen The Gypsy King as boisterous or as confident.

Already in serviceable shape in early October, Fury was looking forward to coach SugarHill Steward arriving in Morecambe for hard training.

"Sugar comes over in the next couple of weeks and we'll start the physical boxing side, then with the sparring partners," Fury told The Ring. "I read an article recently: 'Tyson Fury hasn't started training yet.' When... ever... would I start training for a fight three months before it? It's not like I've been out of the ring for two years. I'm match-fit. I'm coming off a 10-rounder and a 12-rounder. I need about four weeks of sparring, a bit of sharpening up, and I'll be ready to rock-n-roll."

The Ring caught up with boxing's ultimate nonconformist, who offered his views on the first Usyk fight and his brutal plans for the money-spinning rematch.

Illustration by Chris Wormell

The Ring: You've been the king of pre-fight psychology for years now. You had Klitschko and Wilder eating out of your hand. How hard have you found it to get inside Usyk's head?

Tyson Fury: I'm not Professor X. It's not a thing where I try to get in someone's mind. If they're weak enough to think I'm Professor X, then let them think it. I treat all of these fights the same. I'm not any different from any other press conference, am I?

The Ring: Apart from when you dressed up like Batman.

Fury: I mean in the way I act at press conferences. I'm the same as I was years ago when I wasn't even into double digits in fights. I've been similar in confidence and in performing.

The Ring: Even though Usyk is a rival, there seems to be authentic respect between you. Is that the case, or do you need to dislike him to do your job in the ring?

Fury: I don't know him as a person. I've bumped into him, I think, three times in my life. And seeing him at a boxing event isn't knowing him. That's only what he wants you to know, or the public to know. I don't know him as a person. He seems OK, but I don't know him like, "Hiya mate, let's go for a beer."

The Ring: In the first fight, your jab was excellent, but I was surprised that you moved as much as you did early. Was that the game plan?

Fury: I was just using my boxing ability. I was using my jab, setting him up for head and body shots, and I didn't find him hard to hit. I was expecting this wizard or matrix in front of me, and it wasn't that way at all. For most of that fight, I felt like it was some lad in the gym that I was having a move around with. It seems silly, because on paper he has a victory over me, but it wasn't one of my hardest fights.

I've watched it a thousand times, over and over, and I still don't believe I lost that fight. If you want to use your imagination and be really, really, really shitty towards me, you could have given me a draw, but there's no way he beat me that night. I know he's got the victory over me, but that's for reasons other than the boxing."

The Ring: What are the other reasons?

Fury: There's a lot of reasons. There's some political reasons; it's not just boxing. I knew going into this fight that it was more than just a boxing fight. But, on the other hand, the rewards outweighed the risk. If they say to me, "Fight the top 50 heavyweights in the world, one after the other, for X-Y-Z amount of money," what do you think I'm going to say? Line them up!

If the risk outweighs the reward, then no one is going to do it. But if the reward outweighs the risk, most people are going to do it.

The Ring: The reason I asked you about the movement is we've seen Usyk drain opponents by forcing them to work harder than they want to work – plenty of feints, in and out, quick feet, constant pressure. Did he tire you out?

Fury: He didn't tire me out. I just got caught, mate. That's what happens in boxing. Getting caught in one round, getting a 10-8 round, don't win you a fuckin' fight.

I've been down twice in Round 4 against [Deontay] Wilder, got back up and got back to my boxing. Just because you get a knockdown round doesn't automatically mean you win the fight.

Even though I landed five times the amount of punches [Usyk] did in Round 8, he caught me with a good shot on the nose right at the end of the round. I'll give him Round 9 as a 10-8 round because I got caught, and I'll give him Round 10 because I was recovering. I won 11 and 12 as well. For me, I give him eight, nine and 10, and he could have won the first round, but that's it. I've even tried to be biased towards him by giving him rounds that he maybe didn't win and I still don't see it.

It is what it is. Yesterday don't matter and tomorrow is a mystery, so we'll see what today brings us.

The Ring: Round 6 was huge for you and that was as bad as I've ever seen Usyk hurt. What were your thoughts when you watched that round back? Do you have any regrets about not going through a second phase of attack and trying to get him out?

Fury: I hit him with two big uppercuts in a row and he didn't fall over. Was I to empty my tank when he wasn't ready to go? If he was ready to go in Round 6, I'd have got him out of there, wouldn't I?

He wasn't ready to go, and I was having that much of my own way that I wasn't in a rush. It was one-sided. From Round 2 to Round 7, it wasn't even a contest. I was playing, I had my hands behind my back. I was having fun in there. I don't know if it looked like that from the outside, but it definitely felt like that from the inside.

The Ring: I thought you showed tactical superiority from Rounds 3 through 7.

Fury: Of course … If I'd have thought that I was behind in that fight, I'd have went for a fuckin' knockout in Rounds

Richard Pelham

Fury was at his best when he kept his foot on the gas and took the fight to Usyk.

11 and 12, wouldn't I?

Hand on heart, in the mighty name of Jesus Christ, at the end of that fight, I didn't even have one percent of me thinking "I've lost this fight." But when they said split decision, I thought, "Oh, it's going away, this!" It is what it is, but it's boxing. It happens!

The Ring: There's talk that Usyk is susceptible to body shots. What are your thoughts on that theory after 12 rounds against him? You were landing some great body shots with the right hand.

Fury: On both sides of the body, left and right, and uppercuts. If you look at the fight, I was hitting him with body shots and uppercuts from either hand.

He was walking towards me, and I was using my boxing. If someone's walking towards you, it's easier to land shots on them.

The Ring: This is what I'm saying. I spoke to you previously and you said he was a middleweight; he was too small. Why was he walking towards you? Honest answer.

Fury: Because that wasn't the game plan. The game plan was to box his head off like I was doing, and it worked. Obviously, I got caught. You can't help getting caught. People get caught all the time, don't they? I've been caught myself, many, many times.

What went wrong? Well, I got fuckin' punched in the face ... hard. That's what went wrong. Do you know what I mean?

The Ring: The ninth round was hell, or it looked like it. I've never seen you that hurt for a sustained period. What gets you through those moments? Did you think he was going to get you out?

Fury: Never. I wouldn't even go down. I wouldn't even take a knee for the bastard. Not a chance! No way!

Listen, he caught me in Round 9 and it had an effect on me. He had his shot, didn't he? He had his shot to finish me with maybe 15 shots clean, whether he hit me or whether he didn't ... good shots. He couldn't drop me over and that was me on Bambi legs.

When you have the chance to finish The Gypsy King like that, like Wilder did in Round 12 [of fight one] and Round 4 [of fight three], then you're in some severe trouble. They had their shot. It's like Tupac said, "Five shots couldn't drop me. I took it and smiled. Now you 'bout to feel the wrath of a menace."

I owe Turki Alalshikh a cooked rabbit in the next one. When it comes to a decision, I'm not going to get it. I know that. I'm not stupid. But they can't stop me from knocking a motherfucker out!

The Ring: Can you pinpoint the mistake you made that led to you being hurt in that round?

Fury: I didn't make a mistake. It's not a mistake. It's like with Anthony Joshua the other night [against Daniel Dubois] – he didn't make a mistake. It's what the other guy did: He punched him in the

Fury admits he played around at times during the first fight. He'll be meaner in the rematch.

face and it hurt him.

You could say that about all the knockdowns. I've been down 10 times in my career. I don't say I made mistakes. I just got caught. It's a part of boxing. Some people get caught and they don't recover, like AJ the other night. Some people get caught and they recover and come back to win rounds. I'm one of those people.

The Ring: There was a lot of clowning and showboating, Tyson. Do you regret taking your eye off the ball?

Fury: If my granny had a set of balls, she'd be my granddad. Hindsight is a wonderful thing. Would I regret not putting on the Euromillions if my numbers came up? Hell, yeah, I'd regret it, but it's not going to help me win the Euros, is it? Life doesn't work like that.

I don't regret anything. I know some people have said that I didn't box well, but I'll honestly say it's the best I've boxed in years. I thought I boxed absolutely fantastic, but there's a lot more to come from me. There were problems in camps that I won't ever talk about because I'm not an excuse-maker. I had a lot of stuff going on. Forget the cut (a sparring injury that delayed the original February date) – forget leaving one camp with a massive cut, then only having a few months to train and heal and spar. That's nothing compared to what I had in my camp. Forget that.

The Ring: You've been a professional since December 2008. How have you dealt with your first defeat, psychologically?

Fury: I haven't paid attention, because in my heart, I know I didn't lose the fight. If I'd have lost, I'd say, "Look, you beat me, fair play to you," shake your hand, as I always do. I did that anyway. I took it like a boss!

But, at the end of the day, I don't believe he beat me, and he knows he didn't beat me. At the end of that fight when I walked over to his corner, it was the morale of a loser.

Look, I can say whatever I want, but decisions have been made and he has a victory over me. I have the opportunity to run it back, so fantastic.

The Ring: We've seen you make tactical adjustments in rematches. What will you do differently next time?

Fury: I've had three rematches. If you look at the John McDermott fight, the first one was a close fight, the second one I knocked him out. Deontay Wilder, the first one was a close fight, the second one I knocked him out. Derek Chisora, the first one was a close fight, the second one I knocked him out.

So, if rematches are anything to go by, (YELLS LOUD) we're expecting a knockout, Tommy!!!! (laughs)

The Ring: You told me how you would beat [Wladimir] Klitschko and how you would beat Wilder. Can you

Nick Potts - PA Images

be as direct when it comes to Usyk? Can you tell me how you win this fight?

Fury: I'm going to set about him. I'm going to knock him out. I'm going to walk him down. I'm going to beat the fuck out of him. I'm not going on the back foot; I'm going to punch his head right in. That's it! I'm gonna go on that front foot – all-out attack.

There's no glory in losing on points in a decision where I could have won, should have won, but I didn't get it … that ain't glory for me. Glory for me is going out and taking it into my own hands. While I'm in there for the 36 minutes, I have the opportunity to knock him out. By doing that, putting pressure on him, hitting him to the head and body, smashing him to pieces, that's what I've gotta do. Whether it's gonna be as easy as what I'm saying … it might be a different thing when I'm in there, but that's my plan. I've got to take him out, just to make sure.

The Ring: Should you get revenge, is this even more legacy-defining for you than if you'd won? To come back and beat the first man to beat you.

Fury: Yeah, get a victory over him and put myself up there as a three-time heavyweight champion along with Muhammad Ali, Lennox Lewis, Evander Holyfield and… was there someone else?

The Ring: Michael Moorer, but there's an asterisk there. Moorer was the first guy to win the WBO heavyweight title and that belt wasn't recognized at the time.

Fury: [Francesco] Damiani, wasn't it?

The Ring: I'm sure it was Moorer.

Fury: Oh, okay!

(Ten minutes after this interview concluded, Fury emailed the writer with proof that Damiani was, in fact, the inaugural WBO heavyweight titleholder. Moorer was the third fighter to hold that crown and was the inaugural WBO light heavyweight champion. The Ring would like to bow to the former champ's superior knowledge.)

Fury: Anyway, I'm in good company. There's Ali, Lewis, Holyfield and Moorer. There's only four in history who've done it. Obviously, AJ would have been up there, but it didn't work out for him, so it's my chance next. Three-time!!! Unlucky for some, but lucky for some!

"Glory for me is going out and taking it into my own hands. While I'm in there for the 36 minutes, I have the opportunity to knock him out."

The Ring: If you beat Usyk, you'd currently have to beat Daniel Dubois to become undisputed. Do you want the IBF belt?

Fury: Here's the thing, and this might sound strange to the readers: I've just paid the IBF about a million dollars to fight for their belt. I've been a world champion for as long as I can remember and was undefeated for 17 years. Right now, I don't have an IBF rating. And these are the people who decided my fate.

They don't have me in their top 15. Check it out, early October 2024, updated rankings, I'm not in their top 15. And let's say I lost a split decision to the present champion. Surely I'm worthy of being in the top 15? Fuckin' hell!!!

The Ring: Given what you've said, would you fight for the IBF belt?

Fury: It makes it difficult for me – to pay someone a lot of money to fight for their belt when there's an agenda against me. Now, people might say, "He's bitter toward the IBF because they didn't give him a decision." OK, give me a top 15 ranking, then. I must be good enough to be in the top 15! God Almighty!!!

The Ring Magazine has Usyk as champion and me as number one. The WBC has got me rated number one. The WBO has me rated number one. The WBA already has a number one, so they've got me … somewhere (currently No. 2). The IBF don't have me in their top 15 after paying them a fortune for my last fight – a split-decision loss to their champion. How does that work?

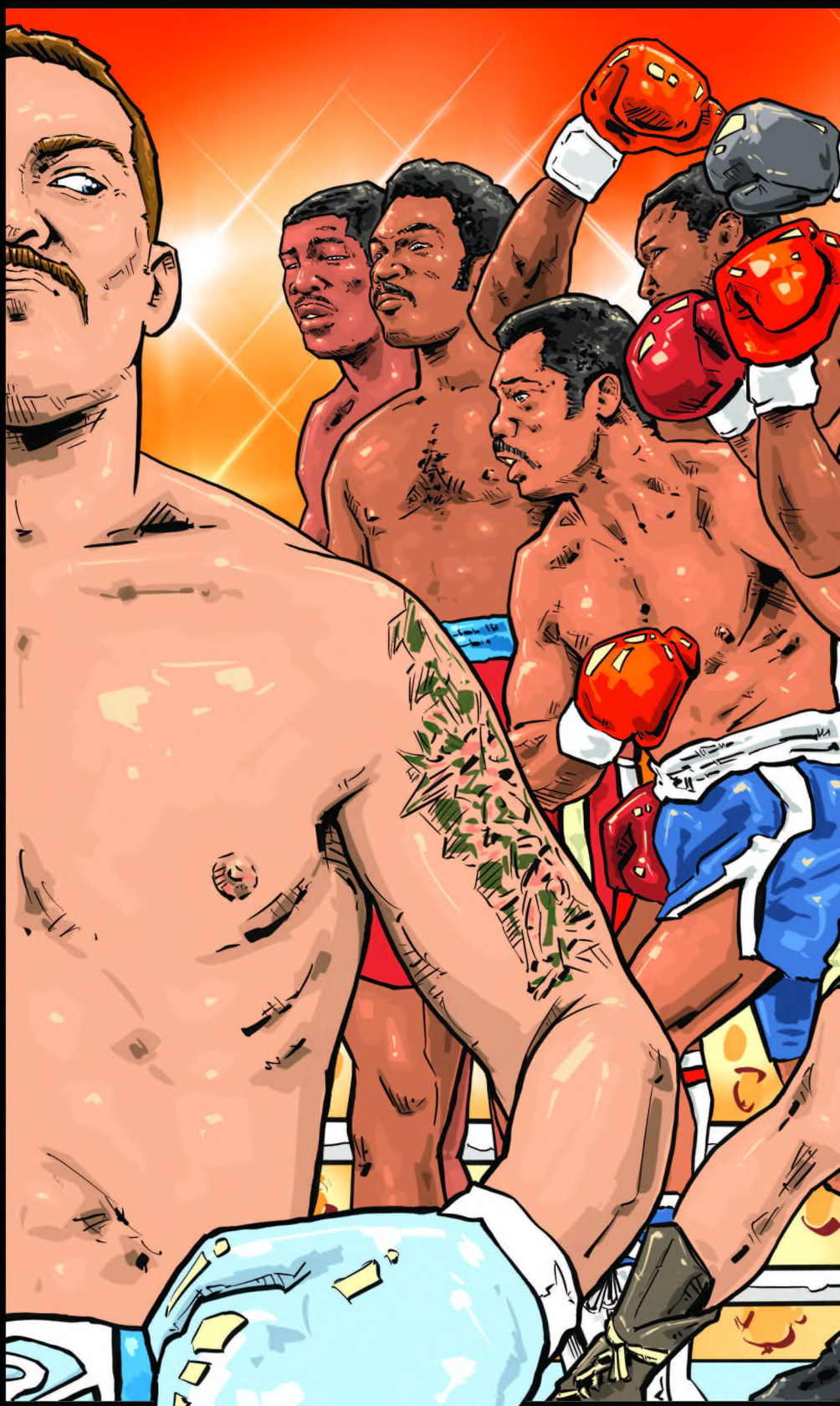
How can they be trusted?

The Ring: Why should fans venture to Riyadh to watch the Fury-Usyk rematch?

Fury: This is the biggest rematch available in boxing today. It's the biggest fight in boxing … by far. Me and Usyk, a man who has already beaten me. Am I completely gone or am I still the old dancing master? We'll see!

If this doesn't excite them, then they need to go and watch racing car driving, WWE wrestling or whatever else they're into. The last fight was a great fight. Regardless of which way it went, it had everything for 12 rounds: boxing, skill, hurtful punches, wobbling, a 10-8 round, a comeback. It had literally everything that any fight could offer. From a fan's point of view, it must have been a fantastic fight to watch. It was a good fight for boxing and for the heavyweight division. RING

USYK



VS. THE GREATS

Do Oleksandr Usyk's skills transcend eras, or would the current heavyweight champ be taken to school by the Hall of Famers from the past? **By Anson Wainwright**

Illustrations by KRONKAAAArt

Oleksandr Usyk – the former undisputed cruiserweight champion, current unified Ring Magazine heavyweight champion and the No. 1 pound-for-pound fighter in the world – has come a long way in a short period of time.

His journey began in 1987 on an auspicious note: He shares a birthday, January 17, with Muhammad Ali. Usyk grew up in the Crimean city of Simferopol, Ukraine, and initially played soccer, but he was drawn to boxing at 15. Usyk's gifts quickly became apparent and he went on a blistering amateur journey, compiling a 335-15 record that culminated with a gold medal victory at the 2012 Olympics. After a six-bout stint with the World Series of Boxing league, Usyk turned professional in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv in November 2013.

The fleet-footed southpaw raced to 9-0 inside of three years against solid opposition, then faced WBO titleholder Krzysztof Głowacki in Poland. Despite being on his opponent's home turf, Usyk showed his hallmark composure in thoroughly outboxing the defending champion to claim his first world title.

A year later, Usyk entered the first round of the World Boxing Super Series (WBSS) cruiserweight tournament in Germany and faced local hero Marco Huck, who himself had once held the WBO belt and defended it an impressive 13 times. Usyk boxed circles around the German and stopped him in the 10th round.

In the WBSS semifinal, Usyk again disappointed hometown fans in Riga, Latvia, when he edged past future Ring cruiserweight champion Mairis Briedis in an epic clash, picking up the WBC title in the process. It was the toughest fight of Usyk's career thus far.

The "Road Warrior" theme for Usyk would continue in the WBSS final: He would face Russian IBF/WBA titleholder Murat Gassiev in Moscow. In the buildup to the fight, Usyk made good use of what would become his trademark phrase. When asked "How do

you feel?" in interviews, he responded with, "I am feel. I am very feel." Thus a nickname was born: The Feel.

In a boss move, amid growing tensions between Ukraine and Russia, Usyk expertly dismantled Gassiev to a near-shutout decision on the scorecards, completing his collection of the four major sanctioning body belts and securing the vacant Ring Magazine title to become undisputed champion. Appropriately, he also took home the WBSS' award – the Muhammad Ali Trophy.

In one final act before leaving the 200-pound division, Usyk packed his bag once again and traveled to England to face former WBC cruiserweight titleholder Tony Bellew.

"The best way to explain Oleksandr Usyk is 'the ultimate fighter' – he can do a bit of everything," said Bellew, who was stopped in eight rounds. "He's skillful. He's classy. His footwork is the best I ever came across. He's the elite professional. He's the perfect boxer.

"When it comes to boxing ability, there's no one better of all the opponents I have faced. He was the guy who figured me out. He was the guy that ended up setting traps that I fell for. Never in my career did I ever fight anyone who could set me traps and I'd fall for them."

Usyk's initial foray at heavyweight was blighted by injury, opponents falling out and the COVID-19 pandemic. In two years, he fought just twice in so-so performances against Chazz Witherspoon and Derek Chisora, leading some to question if he could succeed against the big boys.

He laid any doubts to rest in September 2021, when he met IBF/WBA/WBO titlist Anthony Joshua in London. Usyk's superlative skills got him off to a good start, and he held off the larger Joshua in the mid-rounds before closing strongly, winning the last four rounds on all three judges' scorecards.

Usyk was contractually bound to a rematch with Joshua. However, their meeting was cast into doubt when Russia invaded Ukraine. Usyk joined a defense battalion to help his country.

"I really don't know when I'm going to be stepping back in the ring," he said at the time. "My country and my honor are more important to me than a championship belt."

After doing his part, he headed into training camp and met Joshua again, this time with the vacant Ring Magazine championship on the line after Tyson Fury had "retired."

"The best way to explain Oleksandr Usyk is 'the ultimate fighter' – he can do a bit of everything." - Tony Bellew

One of the first big fights in Saudi Arabia saw a much-improved Joshua. Usyk was hurt by a body shot in Round 9, and with the fight very much in the balance, we saw a clutch moment: Usyk stepped up his game in Round 10, and won the championship rounds on all three judges' scorecards to secure a split decision.

While it was still not possible for Usyk to fight at home, he was able to defend his titles in nearby Poland in front of 40,000 fans against Daniel Dubois.

Usyk dominated the action and was having his way with the British challenger until the fight was tinged with controversy in the fifth round. A borderline shot that put Usyk on the canvas was deemed a low blow, but many observers thought it was a legal body punch. Usyk took the allotted five minutes to recover and got back to work. He stopped Dubois in Round 9.

For a while, Usyk and Fury had circled each other. It took the chairman of Saudi Arabia's General Entertainment Authority, Turki Alalshikh, to broker a deal with both camps, but the initial February 17 showdown was postponed to May 18 after Fury was cut in sparring.

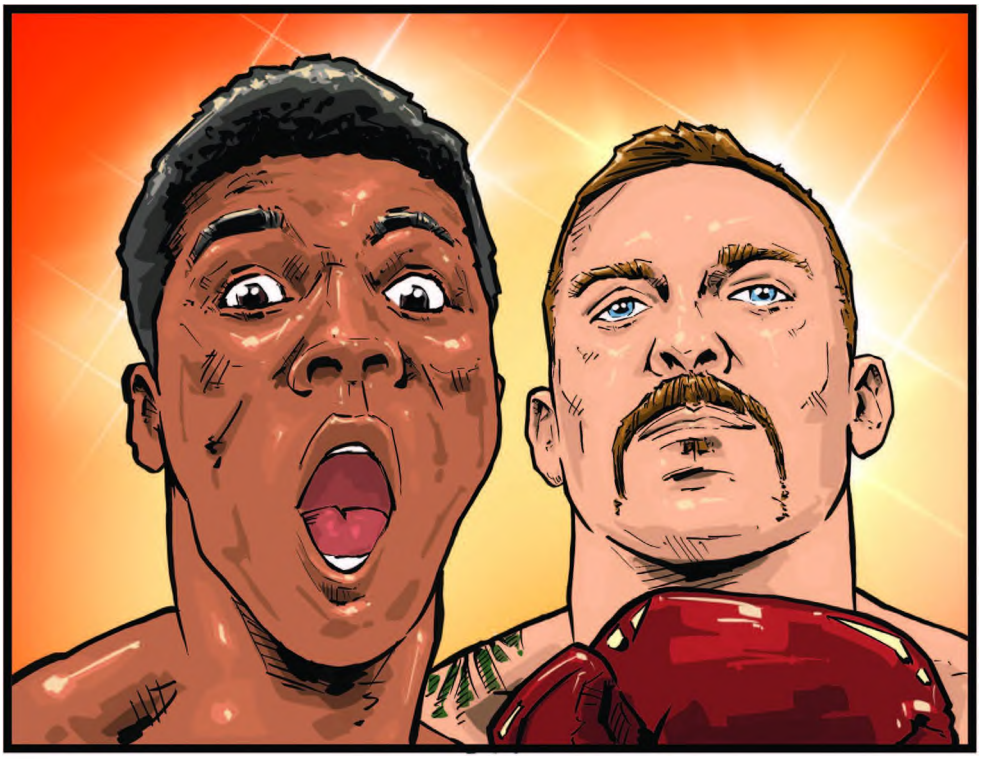
The laser-focused Usyk did well in the first three rounds before a clowning Fury got more serious and settled into a rhythm. With the fight going in the Englishman's direction, Usyk again found that clutch moment to fire back in Round 8 before badly hurting Fury in Round 9.

Usyk boxed intelligently in Round 10 and then held off Fury's late charge to win by split decision. The former undisputed cruiserweight champion was now the first undisputed heavyweight champion since Lennox Lewis in 1999.

"Watching how his career has progressed since me, it's unbelievable," said Bellew. "You're talking about a guy who has gone up to the heavyweight division and faced a 6-foot-9, 20-stone (280-pound) monster. If I was 6-foot-9 and 20 stone, I'd invade Russia, nevermind box! And he beat him! And he didn't beat Fury by running away from him and outboxing him, which I thought he would do. He beat him by pressing him back all night and bullying him. I never, ever thought that was possible for him in that weight division. He proved not just me but the whole world wrong."

Usyk is regarded as a future first-ballot Hall of Famer, blessed with charisma, outstanding hand speed, sublime footwork and, when he needs to, he has been able to dig deep within himself and find something special.

Montreal-based trainer/cutman Russ Anber, who has worked with Usyk



since he fought Thabiso Mchunu in December 2016, has peeked behind the mask and is well-placed to talk about what he has seen.

"I think one of the most amazing things about him is this guy thinks he's a middleweight," said Anber. "He's almost a throwback fighter in that regard. He fights the way heavyweights used to fight back in the day, where they were working for three minutes a round. They weren't pacing and holding and grabbing; they were there for a fight. He conditions himself to be able to do that. Having been involved with him first and seeing how he trains, I can tell you that this doesn't happen naturally. He puts this effort in and he works extremely hard in the gym to be able to do what you seen him do in the ring."

Following previous features on Naoya Inoue and Terence Crawford, we decided to enlist the services of reputed matchmakers Roberto Diaz, Joe Rotonda and Jolene Mizzone to discuss mythical matchups with 12 Hall of Famers and ask how Usyk might've done against these all-time greats.

We'll never know for certain, but it's fun to debate. Here's how they thought the respective matches would play out.

USYK VS. MUHAMMAD ALI

In his prime, Ali was a sight to behold. The 1960 Olympics gold medalist was blessed with unnatural speed of foot and hand for a heavyweight, had outstanding skills and was as tough as they come. He fought everyone from his generation, and it was only after his three-and-a-half-year hiatus that he lost to Joe Frazier (UD 15) – a loss he avenged later. Ali's larger-than-life persona took him to icon status, perhaps making him the most famous man in the world at one point, and inspired generations to come. He experienced everything in the ring except an elite southpaw – Ali only fought two during his legendary career.

Roberto Diaz: "Ali was and will always be the greatest of all time in my book. Ali controls Usyk with speed and mind. Ali by 12-round unanimous decision."

Joe Rotonda: "In 2024, these are two somewhat undersized heavyweights, but with great speed and athleticism. Both are so technically on point, I think the biggest deciding factor here would have to be the speed. Not that Usyk doesn't possess quickness on his end, but Muhammad, in my opinion, does have the edge here. The movement, agility, plus the quick jab will make it difficult for Usyk to really get into a rhythm. Muhammad Ali by close decision."

Jolene Mizzone: "The crazy thing with this fight is Ali didn't really fight any southpaws, so I think Usyk would give him problems. But at the end of the day, Ali's footwork, in his prime, may edge Usyk. Ali's hand would be raised via 12-round unanimous decision."

ALI: 3-0

USYK VS. JOE FRAZIER

Frazier was a very aggressive fighter who barreled forward and threw nonstop punches, including a very wicked left hook. If you couldn't keep him off you, you were in trouble. The 1964 Olympic gold medalist was the first man to defeat Ali as a pro and was always adept at finding a way to

challenge, if not beat, the best. He later gave "The Greatest" fits in the second and third fights of their iconic trilogy. Interestingly, Usyk would be four inches taller and would hold a five-inch reach advantage over the compact Frazier but would likely weigh about the same.

Diaz: "Great fight, and Frazier would bring the smoke, but Usyk would be too smart to trade and he would use the ring and box. Usyk by 12-round split decision."
Rotonda: "Usyk will have a much-needed height and reach advantage here. I think this fight could look somewhat similar to Usyk vs. Gassiev. As long as he can avoid that left hook from Frazier, then he can sit behind his jab for most of the night and control the distance. I have Usyk in a decision win in this one."
Mizzone: "I think in this fight Frazier would have a hard time with a boxer, which is what Usyk is, and will also have problems with Usyk's southpaw stance. So I am going with Usyk by UD 12."

USYK: 3-0

USYK VS. KEN NORTON

The fighting Marine fought out of a crouched stance, often using a cross-armed defense, but he liked to stalk forward. The unorthodox style regularly troubled even the best of the golden era. He beat Muhammad Ali once and gave him trouble in two more contests, and he also gave Larry Holmes all he could handle over 15 epic rounds. Though he was blown away by George Foreman (TKO 2), it was a completely different style from that of Usyk. If Norton brought his A-game, he was a handful for anyone.

"He fights the way heavyweights used to fight back in the day, where they were working for three minutes a round." - Russ Anber

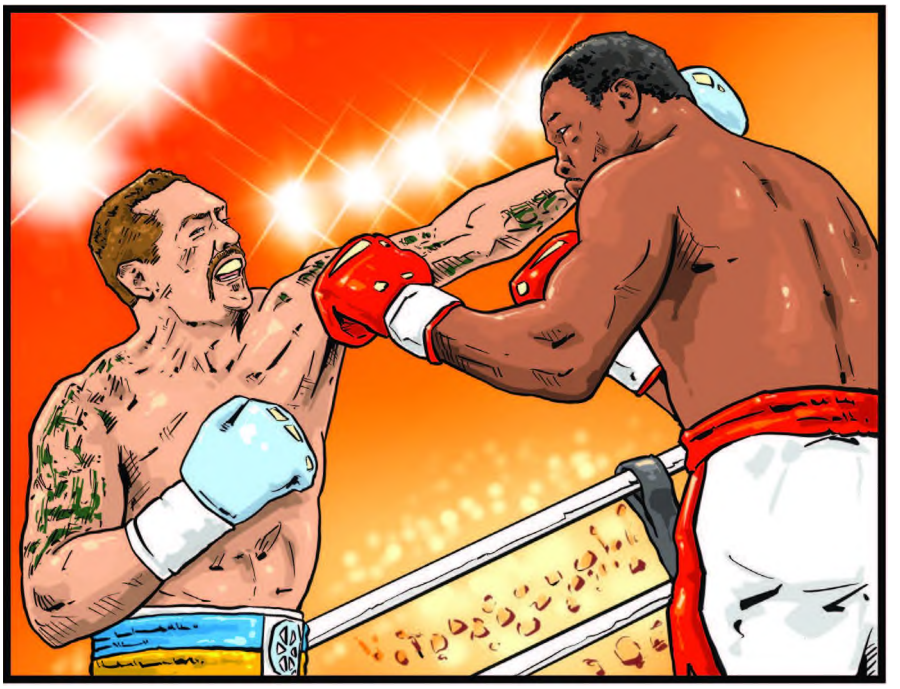
Diaz: "I liked Norton, and the one who fought Holmes is tough to beat. But in most cases, his chin betrayed him. I see a competitive bout for five rounds, but Usyk takes over after that and stops Norton in nine."
Rotonda: "Ken Norton was so strong, could really hang with the best of them. He would have to really lure Usyk into fighting his fight in order to overcome the Ukrainian in this one. I think he would find himself chasing Usyk most of the fight, and Oleksandr should be able to dictate the pace after the first couple of rounds. I'll side with Usyk in a decision win."
Mizzone: "I think Usyk's boxing style would be too much for Norton to handle. Yes, Norton beat Ali the first time, but it seems that most of the time Norton stepped up, he struggled. I am going with Usyk, TKO 10."

USYK: 3-0

USYK VS. GEORGE FOREMAN

There were two versions of Foreman: the 1968 gold medalist-turned-menacing, brooding wrecking machine of the 1970s and the loveable grandfather who started his comeback in the late 1980s, regaining the title in the mid-'90s. Both had very heavy hands. Both were capable of causing mayhem. For purposes of scoring this feature, we're focusing on the first version. Foreman bludgeoned Joe Frazier (TKO 2) and Ken Norton (TKO 2) into defeat before being shocked by Muhammad Ali (KO 8) in the "Rumble in the Jungle" in 1974. In his second act, after a 10-year hiatus from boxing, he became the oldest fighter (at the time) to win a world title when he stunned Michael Moorer (KO 10) at 45 years old. Usyk would need to box the perfect fight and avoid getting caught by big punches.

Diaz: "Whether the young lion or the older version, Big George would be too strong and Usyk would be too smart to stand and slug. Usyk would use the ring and box. Young George by KO. Usyk by 12-round unanimous decision over the older version."
Rotonda: "I love George Foreman. He was so dominant during his first run in the 1970s. Oleksandr Usyk isn't a guy who is going to try and fight fire with fire, though; he has a much higher fight IQ than that. George wasn't the most technically sound heavyweight either, though. But he had those eraser shots in both hands, which made up for any flaws he may have had elsewhere. Outside of Ali, nobody was really able to withstand his power during his prime



years. I'd have to think this wouldn't be any different. Usyk will make it interesting, because he is just that good, but at some point George will land his shot and that'll be it, just like it was for so many others. Foreman by stoppage."
Mizzone: "In this fight, I think Usyk will have a problem with Foreman's power. Once Foreman hits him, I think Usyk will fight a different fight and run a little. But in the end, I think Foreman catches him and stops him in the eighth round."

FOREMAN: 3-0

USYK VS. LARRY HOLMES

Holmes learned as a sparring partner for Ali and was later a dominant force who bridged the Ali and Mike Tyson eras. However, the "Easton Assassin" was so much more. He was blessed with excellent fundamentals, quick hands, a big heart when called upon and one of the greatest jabs in boxing history. He notably outlasted Norton (SD 15), got off the floor to stop big-punching Earnie Shavers (TKO 11) and stopped previously unbeaten Gerry Cooney (TKO 13). This would be a clash of two fantastic technicians.

Diaz: "Holmes has probably the greatest jab I have ever seen and would break Usyk. Holmes TKO 9."
Rotonda: "Battle of the jabs in this one. Larry Holmes literally made a career out of perfecting the jab. It'll take a while, but at some point I believe Usyk will find himself getting through the jab and being able to work on the inside here. I would have to go with Usyk in a super-close decision win. He just has more in the arsenal, in my opinion, than the Easton Assassin."
Mizzone: "I think this fight would play out how the Holyfield fight played out – Usyk by 12-round unanimous decision."

USYK: 2-1

USYK VS. MICHAEL SPINKS

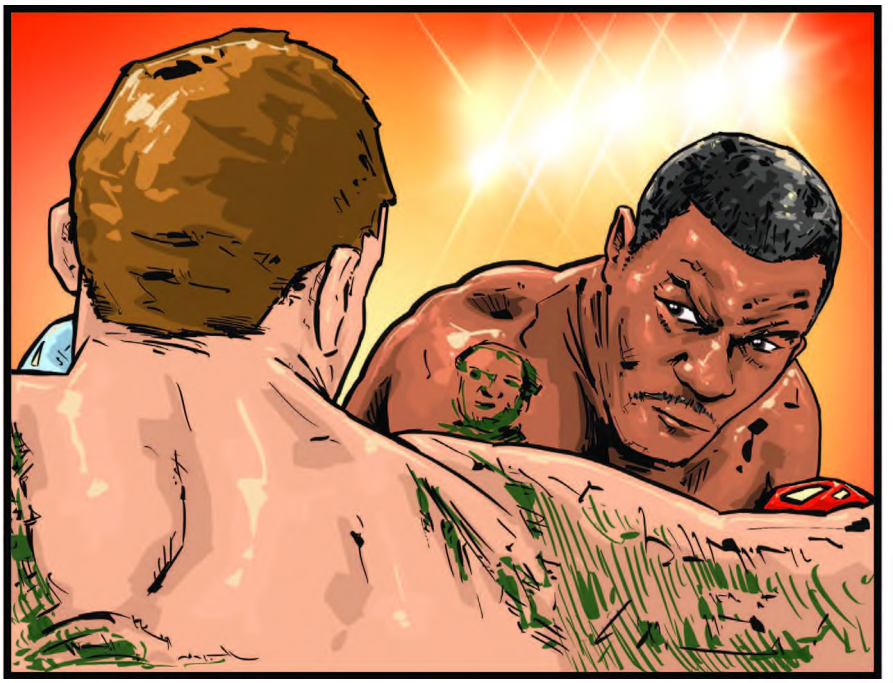
Spinks was a member of the hugely successful 1976 U.S. Olympic team, winning gold as a middleweight. As a professional, he became the undisputed light heavyweight champion in the early 1980s and is regarded as one of the best 175-pounders in history. He then made a jump to heavyweight and stunned Larry Holmes (UD 15) to become the Ring Magazine and IBF titleholder. Spinks was tall and rangy and liked to box on the outside, but also had a vicious right hand, which he dubbed the "Spinks Jinx." It was a weapon that was very capable of ending fights.

Diaz: "Both smaller heavyweights, so both quick with footwork. Spinks would try to land the right hand, while Usyk would work the body. In the end, a very entertaining fight with Usyk winning a 12-round unanimous decision."
Rotonda: "Michael Spinks is extremely crafty in the ring, really knows how to use his range well. Usyk, on the other hand, is so good defensively, doesn't take much punishment at all. I can see the speed on Spinks throwing Usyk off a bit early on, but as the fight goes on I think Usyk will steal those later rounds and walk away with a close decision win."
Mizzone: "I am going to edge Spinks in this one. I think Spinks would stick around with Usyk and wouldn't allow Usyk to fight his normal style. Spinks by 12-round unanimous decision."

USYK: 2-1

USYK VS. MIKE TYSON

A Cus D'Amato protegé, Tyson



exploded onto the heavyweight scene in the mid-1980s, using his fearsome demeanor, freakish speed and power, as well as underrated skill and technique, to wreak havoc on the division over the second half of the decade. The youngest heavyweight champ ever earned hundreds of millions en route to becoming one of the most famous people in the world. His downfall was equally dramatic. In his prime, however, Tyson's skills were almost always overlooked alongside his reputation, which in itself was a formidable weapon.

Diaz: "The excitement prior to the fight is second to none. However, that wouldn't last long once the bell rings. Tyson wins by KO 3."
Rotonda: "Such a tough fight to call. I am going to have to lean toward Usyk in this one. He has faced monster punchers before – Briedis, Dubois, Joshua, Gassiev, etc. He has done a great job of controlling the pace of the fight and neutralizing his opponents with his jab. I don't think this would be much different. Mike would make it very interesting early on, but once Usyk gets into his rhythm, I think he would frustrate Tyson and coast to a decision win."

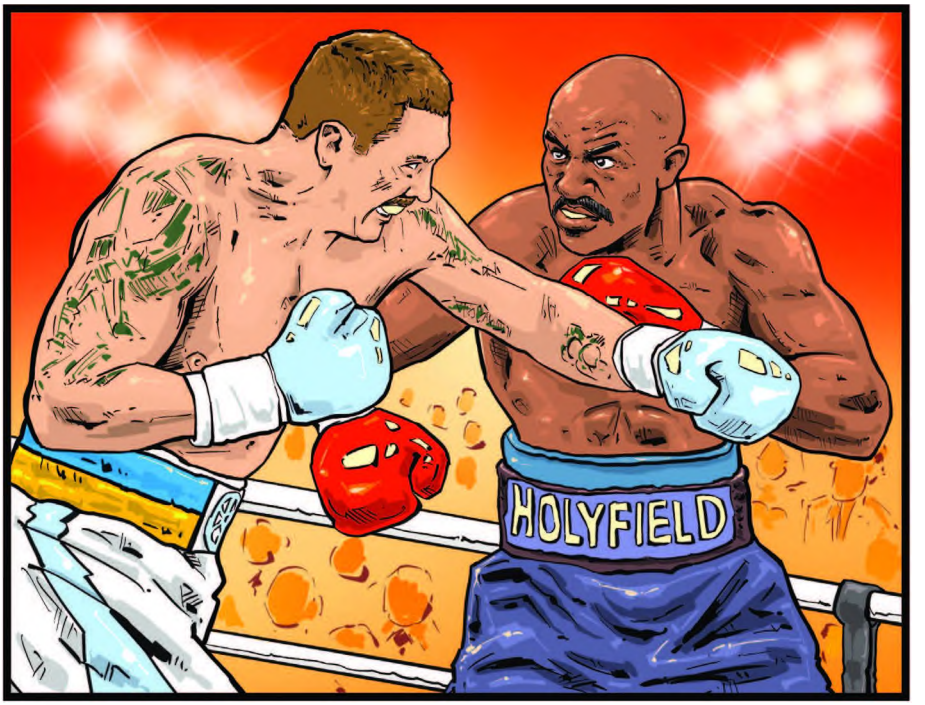
Mizzone: "This one is interesting, since I think this fight is a mental fight, like most of Tyson's fights. If Usyk isn't intimidated before he gets in the ring, he will box circles around him and win a 12-round unanimous decision."

USYK: 2-1

USYK VS. EVANDER HOLYFIELD

Holyfield was a light heavyweight bronze medalist at the 1984 Olympics, turned professional at cruiserweight and, like Usyk, became undisputed champion. The two rightly vie for the top spot as the greatest cruiserweight of all time. Holyfield transitioned to heavyweight and beat an ill-prepared Buster Douglas for the championship, then defended his titles against aged veterans Larry Holmes and George Foreman. He faced Riddick Bowe three times, Lennox Lewis twice and is of course known for losing a chunk of his ear to Mike Tyson, though Holyfield won both of their encounters. With his indomitable will, the Real Deal was always tough to beat. This would have the makings of an all-time classic.

Diaz: "What a fight. Very similar in every department, including the will to win. Who wants it more? Holyfield's inside game is amazing and his nonstop action would be too much for Usyk. Holyfield by KO 10."
Rotonda: "Prime Evander Holyfield is a problem for any heavyweight in any era, especially if you give him someone more his size. As good as Usyk is, I think he would have a hard time in the later rounds keeping Evander off of him.



I have Evander in this one edging out a decision win."

Mizzone: "Both cruiserweights coming to heavyweight. These guys have a similar story, but I am going to edge Usyk in this one. I think it would be a very close fight, but Usyk would win a 12-round split decision."

HOLYFIELD: 2-1

USYK VS. RIDDICK BOWE

Bowe picked up silver at the 1988 Olympics and turned professional under legendary trainer Eddie Futch, who nurtured improvements that would help his fighter become the undisputed champion. Bowe edged Holyfield in two of their three meetings and suffered no other losses during his career, but there were some big names of the 1990s missing from his resume, including Lennox Lewis, who'd beaten him in the 1988 Olympics final. A lack of discipline saw Bowe squander what could have been a better career. He was a modern heavyweight – big and strong with excellent skills, pinpoint jab and a good inside game. The focus wasn't always there, but the early-career version of Bowe was a tough night for anyone.

Diaz: "Bowe was the modern-day Holmes – a great jab and willing to trade bombs. I truly believe he is very underrated. Bowe would try to knock Usyk out. Very entertaining. Bowe by 12-round unanimous decision."

Rotonda: "I always said that a motivated, healthy and in-shape Riddick Bowe is one of the most dangerous heavyweights of all time. However, Usyk has proven to be elite, and although undersized in most fights in this division, he finds ways to push through and create opportunities for himself in the ring. I think him being so technically sound will frustrate Bowe in this bout and cause Riddick to make mistakes that Usyk will ultimately capitalize on. Usyk by decision."

Mizzone: "I am going to have to go with Bowe in this one. I don't think that Usyk's boxing style will bother Bowe. I think that Bowe would use his size to bully Usyk and stop him in the 10th round."

BOWE: 2-1

USYK VS. LENNOX LEWIS

Lewis shocked Razor Ruddock with a second-round stoppage in 1992 and was then promoted to WBC champion status when old rival Riddick Bowe refused to face him. Although Lewis was upset by Oliver McCall, he retooled under Kronk leader Emanuel Steward and went on to become one of the best heavyweights of all time. Lewis was big, strong and an excellent boxer, using his ramrod jab to dictate the pace and his big right hand to end proceedings. This figures to be statistically a tough night out for Usyk. However, it could be argued that Lewis didn't fight a clever, mobile southpaw during his career.

Diaz: "Hard to believe, but a shutout, 12 rounds to zero. Lewis by 12-round unanimous decision."

Rotonda: "This is a battle of two of the best heavyweight jabs in the sport. Lennox always did a good job of making smaller fighters feel exactly that. He also had incredible ring IQ. This may not be a slugfest by any means, but it will be super-technical, and I think Lennox will fight a smart fight en route to a razor-thin decision. Lewis by split decision."

Mizzone: "I would have to go with Lewis in this one. I think Lewis was one of the top heavyweights in his time. Usyk is going to have a hard time with Lewis' jab, and I think that Lewis would win this fight in a boring style, kind of like the David Tua fight. With Emanuel [Steward] in his corner, Lewis will have the right game plan to win. Lewis by 12-round unanimous decision."

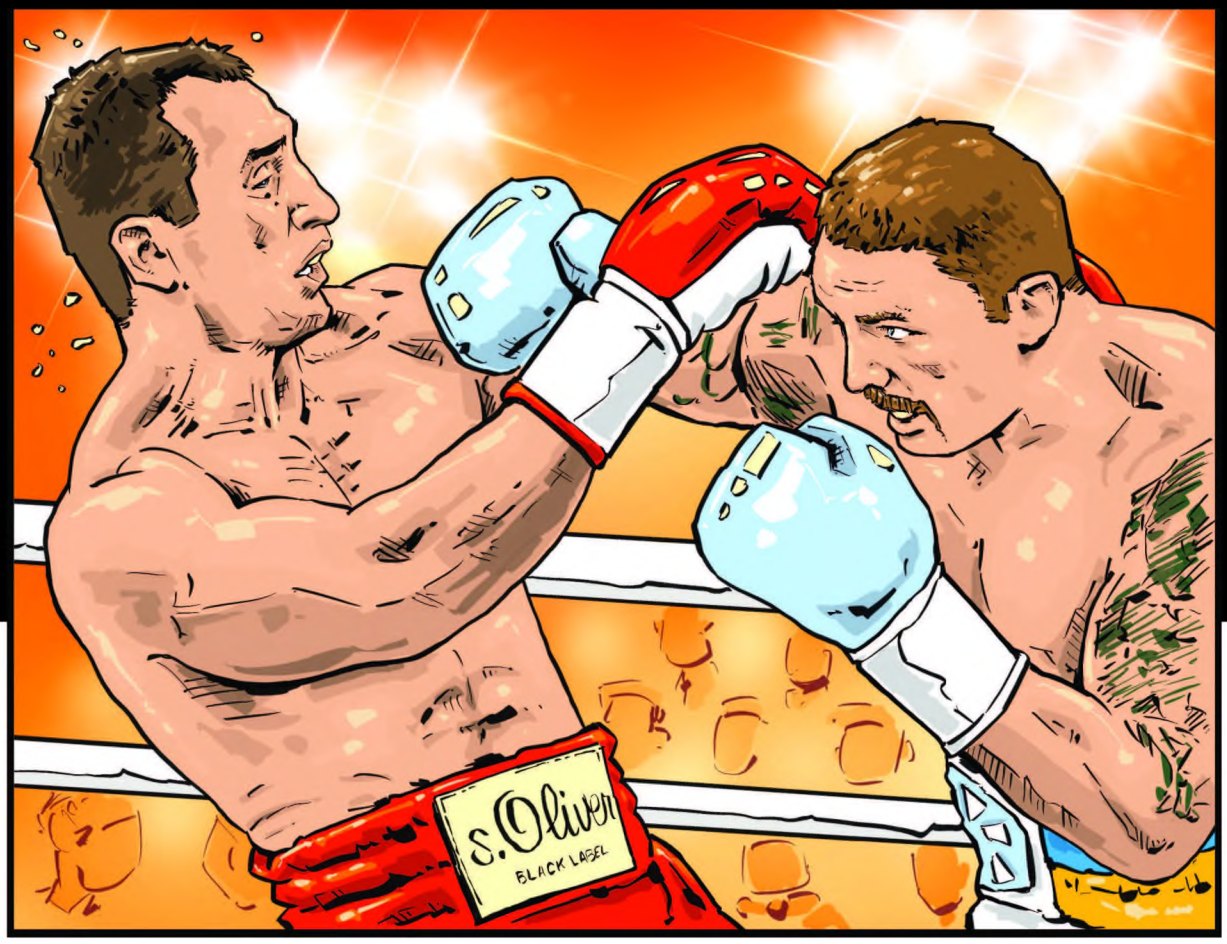
LEWIS: 3-0

USYK VS. VITALI KLITSCHKO

The older Klitschko wasn't as naturally gifted or as technically sound as younger brother Wladimir, but he was more durable, possessing one of the best chins of the late 1990s/2000s heavyweight scene. A former kickboxer, Vitali utilized an unorthodox style to deliver a punishing jab and very powerful right hand. He briefly held the WBO title before being upset by undersized underdog Chris Byrd (due in part to a shoulder injury suffered during the bout). However, Vitali proved his potential and mettle by giving Lennox Lewis all he could handle before being stopped on cuts in 2003. He won the vacant Ring Magazine and WBC titles by halting the dangerous Corrie Sanders in 2004. Following a near-four-year layoff, Vitali reclaimed the WBC title and made nine defenses before retiring and later becoming the mayor of Kyiv.

Diaz: "Usyk would stick and move and try to hold on the inside. Vitali, however, would use his size and power to disrupt Usyk. In a sloppy match with cuts due to a headbutt, we have a technical draw."

Rotonda: "Vitali is a more effective finisher than his brother was. He is also more aggressive stylistically. That style, I think, would pose problems for the much smaller Usyk. Oleksandr will have to be on point with his jab and keep Vitali at bay as much as possible. Similar



to how Usyk was able to avoid the big shots against Anthony Joshua and Tyson Fury, I think he will be able to execute a similar game plan and use his jab to frustrate Vitali throughout the night, en route to a close decision win."
Mizzone: "I think Usyk would give Vitali problems with his southpaw style, kind of like Chris Byrd did. I know Vitali had a shoulder injury, but there is a reason they never fought again. Usyk by 12-round unanimous decision."

USYK: 2-0-1

USYK VS. WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO

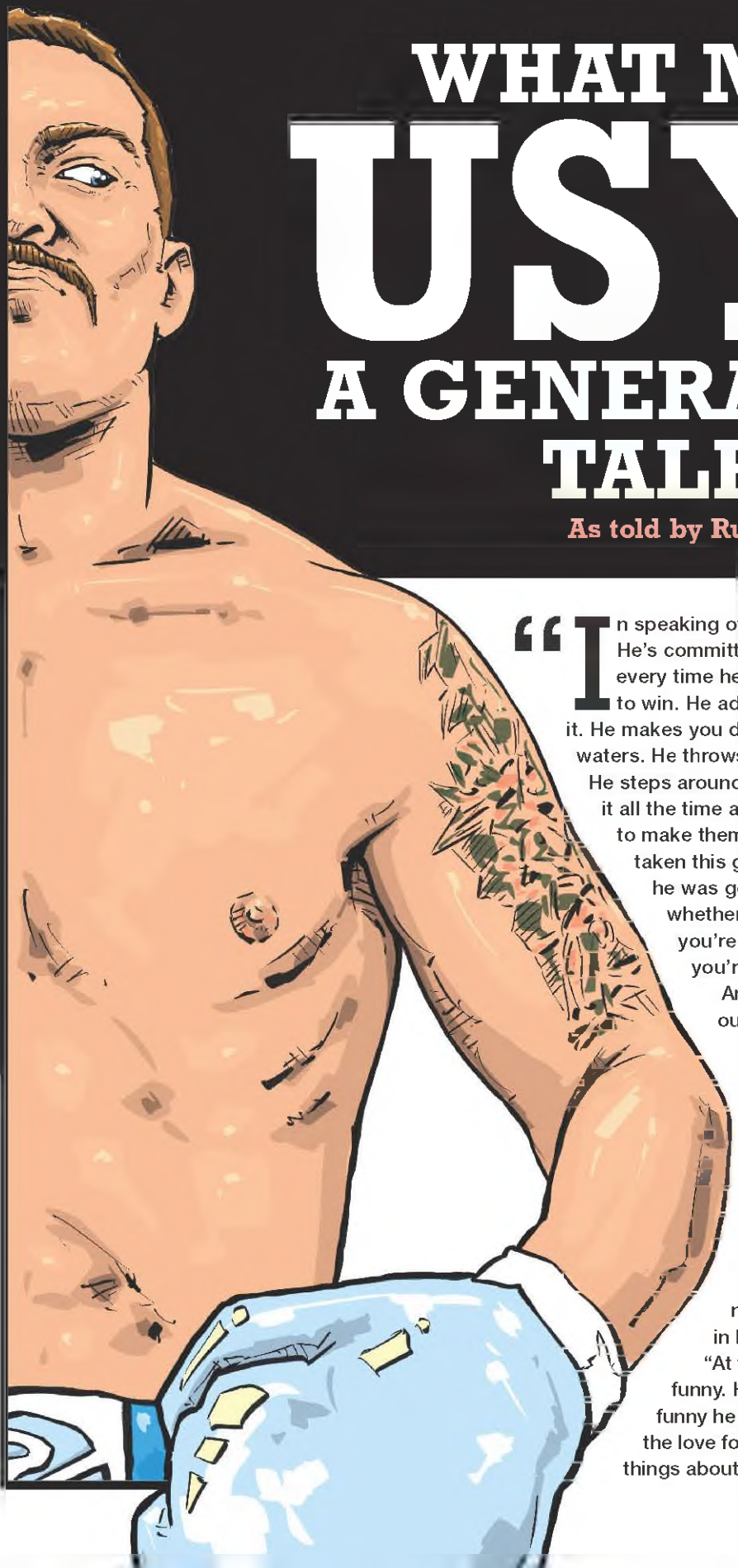
For over a decade, Wladimir and his older brother, Vitali, dominated the heavyweight division. Only Joe Louis had a championship reign longer than Wladimir, who also has the third-highest number of consecutive successful title defenses (18). The tall, powerful Ukrainian was very skilled at keeping his opponents at a distance and quickly tying them up if they got inside. His jab was an excellent tool in beating skilled but undersized fighters like Ruslan Chagaev and Alexander Povetkin. Although Usyk has dealt with bigger men, notably Joshua and Fury, could he do the same against his compatriot? Conversely, how would Klitschko deal with the movement and speed of an elite southpaw?

Diaz: "Usyk would be too busy – in and out, speed – and make it look easy. Usyk by 12-round unanimous decision."
Rotonda: "Wladimir Klitschko will go down as one of the best heavyweights of all time, and at some point Oleksandr Usyk may be in that same category. I think the movement and ability to slip the jab is key here for Usyk. Klitschko's biggest weapon is his jab, and if Usyk can neutralize that and force Wladimir to fight off his back foot, then he will find himself victorious in this one. Usyk by close decision."
Mizzone: "Believe it or not, in this one I think that Usyk would stop Wladimir in this fight. He would frustrate Wladimir, and I think with his southpaw style he would catch him. Usyk by TKO 10."

USYK: 3-0

RESULTS:
(USYK WIN)-("GREAT" WIN)-(DRAW)
DIAZ: 4-7-1
ROTONDA: 8-4
MIZZONE: 7-5

Questions and/or comments can be sent to Anson at elraincoat@live.co.uk, and you can follow him on X @AnsonWainwr1ght.



WHAT MAKES USYK A GENERATIONAL TALENT

As told by Russ Anber

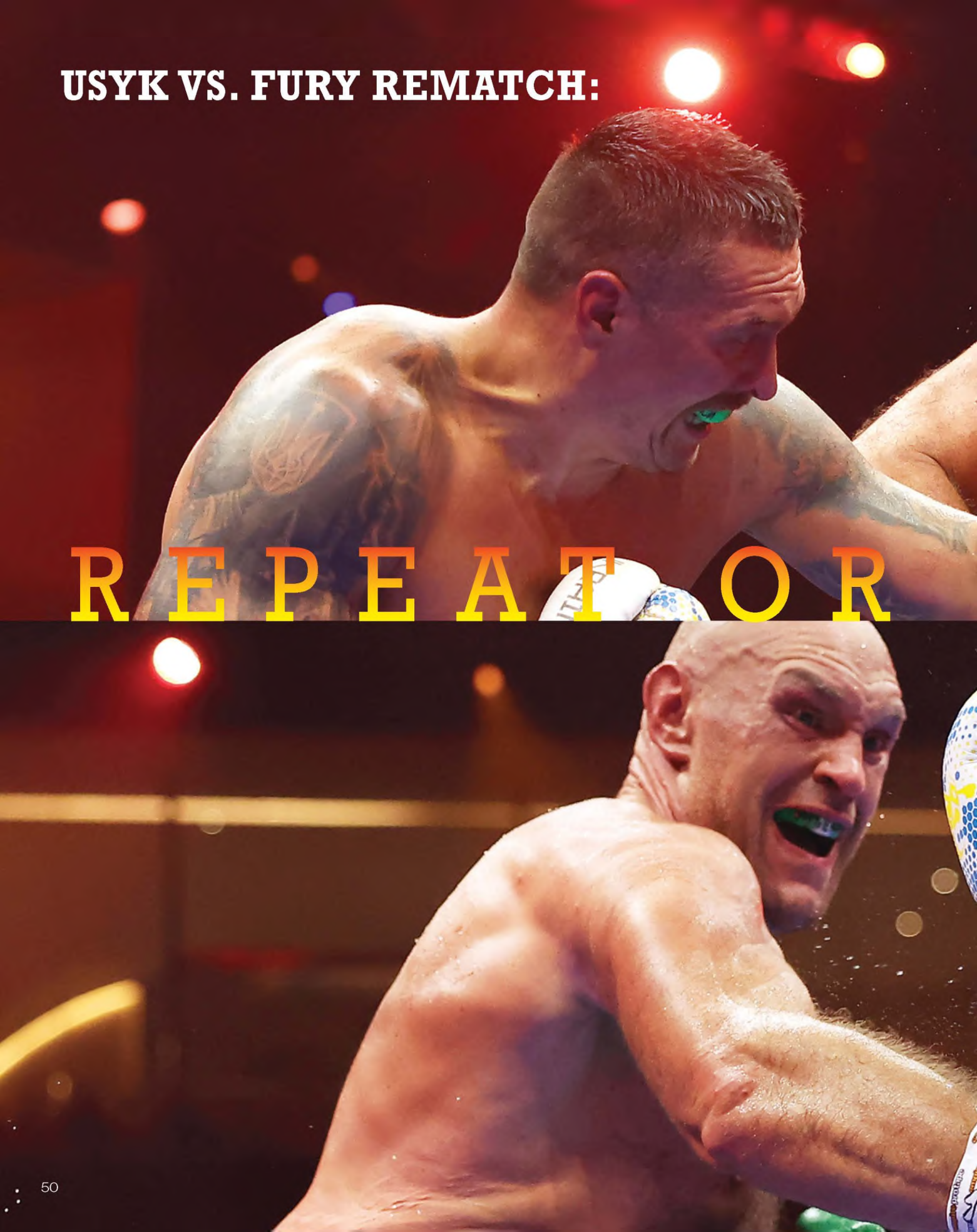
"In speaking of his conviction, he's committed to winning. He's committed to training, and he believes he can win every time he steps into the ring, and he finds a way to win. He adapts strategy for it. He outhustles you for it. He makes you dig deep for it. He takes you into the deep waters. He throws a variety of punches. He's difficult to hit. He steps around you. He has great footwork. And we get on it all the time about the flaws and mistakes, and he's able to make them work for himself. I think you could have taken this guy and put him at any point in history and he was going to be a tough out for anybody he fought, whether it was a cruiserweight or heavyweight. If you're in a fight with Oleksandr Usyk, you know you're in a fight."

Anber also speaks glowingly of Usyk as a man outside the ring.

"I think the ultimate compliment I can give him as a man and myself being the father of a daughter, the best I can say is he's the kind of man you hope your daughter brings home," he said. "He's just an outstanding human. His beliefs, his character, nothing of what he does is fake. He's a sincere, honest, hardworking man who lives by his beliefs and convictions, and he's a very religious man and sticks to it. The religion is not for show. It's serious and plays a great role in his life and raising of his kids.

"At the same time, he's absolutely incredibly funny. He's hilarious. People don't have any clue how funny he can be and the sense of humor he has and the love for life this guy has. I can't say enough good things about him." RING

USYK VS. FURY REMATCH:



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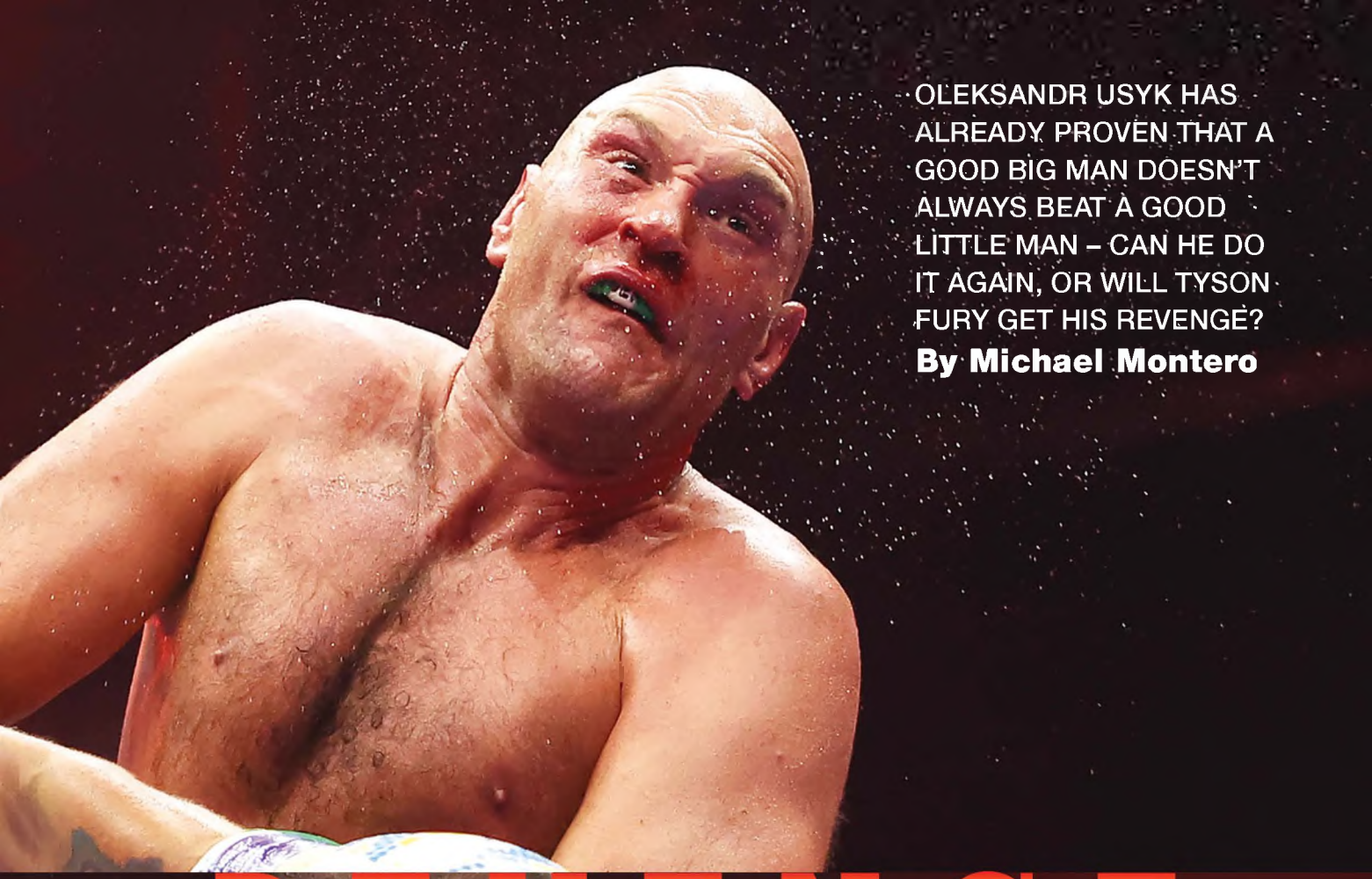


OLEKSANDR USYK HAS ALREADY PROVEN THAT A GOOD BIG MAN DOESN'T ALWAYS BEAT A GOOD LITTLE MAN – CAN HE DO IT AGAIN, OR WILL TYSON FURY GET HIS REVENGE?

By Michael Montero

REVENGE

On December 21 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury will fight again, following a classic first meeting back in May. After a back-and-forth battle more than worthy of the hype, Usyk (22-0, 14 KOs) was awarded a split decision and became the first undisputed heavyweight champion since Lennox Lewis defeated Evander Holyfield more than two decades earlier.

Unfortunately, like Lewis, Usyk's undisputed reign would not last long, due to politics.

Lewis lost his undisputed status just months after beating Holyfield when he elected to fight WBC mandatory Michael Grant next rather than facing John Ruiz, the WBA mandatory. Ruiz took the matter to court, citing a clause in the Lewis-Holyfield contract that stated the winner's first defense as undisputed champion would be against the WBA's number one contender. The court ruled in favor of Ruiz, and the WBA subsequently stripped Lewis.

Fast-forward to this June. After suffering his first professional defeat to Usyk, Fury (34-1-1, 24 KOs) enacted the rematch clause written into their contract. Usyk accepted, and the IBF immediately stripped him for not fighting Daniel Dubois, the interim titleholder who was subsequently upgraded to full champion status. Dubois would go on to defend the belt by knocking out Anthony Joshua in September. The situation frustrated many fans, especially given that Usyk had already defeated both men rather decisively in prior bouts.

Despite the lack of "undisputed" distinction, Usyk vs. Fury II remains perhaps the most globally anticipated rematch in boxing since Canelo Alvarez and Gennadiy Golovkin met for a second time in Las Vegas six years ago.

So, can Usyk flip the adage "a good big man always beats a good little man" upside down once again? Or can Fury turn the tide and become a world champion for the third time in his career? Let's quickly revisit the highlights of the first fight, which also took place in Riyadh earlier this year, and then break down what we learned about both fighters' strengths and vulnerabilities.

Fury found success with his uppercuts during the middle rounds of the first fight.

RING OF FIRE – THE FIRST FIGHT

May 18, 2024, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Tyson Fury (WBC) vs. Oleksandr Usyk (Ring, IBF, WBA, WBO)

Early on, Usyk appeared to be the sharper fighter. According to CompuBox, he landed 14 power punches in the first two rounds to just five for Fury and was much more accurate in total punching (52 percent to 28 percent). Perhaps feeling a sense of urgency, the Brit stepped it up in the third and fourth. Fury would then dominate the middle of the fight, sweeping Rounds 5 through 7 on all three judges' scorecards. The bigger man was having his way, pushing the smaller man back, and things were looking good for Fury. Yet even though he was losing rounds, Usyk did plenty of good work himself and was getting closer and closer with his overhand left. In fact, he out-landed Fury in the seventh and appeared to stun him at the end of the round.

The Ukrainian southpaw, now clearly behind in the fight, raised his level in the eighth, doubling Fury in punches landed (16 to 8). Suddenly he was the one coming forward and pushing his opponent back. The towering Englishman was now sporting a mouse under his right eye along with a bloody and maybe broken nose. Then, in the ninth round, Usyk landed a flush right-left combo that Fury would never fully recover from. Badly hurt, staggering about, the ropes appeared to hold Fury up multiple times before referee Mark Nelson finally called a knockdown near the end of the round. Many observers felt that Nelson had missed multiple opportunities to call a technical knockdown, but nevertheless, Usyk secured an extra point and it felt like a dead-even fight heading into the 10th.

Usyk would go on to control much of the action down the stretch, landing 36 power punches to just 15 for Fury over the final three rounds. From the eighth round on, Usyk out-landed Fury 87 to 50 in total punches (66 to 32 in power punching). Overall, CompuBox credited Usyk with landing more power punches in eight of 12 rounds, including the entire second half of the fight.

Although most fans and media believed that Usyk had won the fight unanimously (the average fan score on BoxRec.com had him winning 116-111), he had to settle for a split decision victory.

Financially, the event generated plenty of money but apparently gave up significant potential income due to illegal streaming. Still, whether they paid for it or not, tens of millions of people watched the fight live. In that sense, Usyk and Fury had managed to break through to the mainstream audience. And on May 29, less than two weeks after the first undisputed heavyweight championship fight in decades, the rematch was set for December 21, right back in Riyadh.

From the moment the announcement was made, fans have been sharing their thoughts and predictions on social media. Many feel that Usyk will "finish what he started" and stop Fury in the second fight. Others proclaim that Fury will "Wilder" Usyk this time around, referencing his dominant performance against Deontay Wilder in their 2020 rematch. Either of those outcomes, along with many others, is certainly possible. It's heavyweight boxing – anything and everything is possible. Both men have had rematches in the past and neither has lost. Barring a draw, however, that's going to change for one of them this December.

REIGNITED – THE REMATCH

December 21, 2024, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia
Oleksandr Usyk (Ring, WBA, WBC, WBO) vs. Tyson Fury

So, let's start with the challenger. What are the keys to victory for Tyson Fury in the rematch? What can he do differently this time around?

KEYS TO VICTORY: TYSON FURY

It is important to remember that Fury had plenty of success in the first bout. He commanded the fifth and sixth rounds, nearly doubling Usyk in total punches landed (42 to 22). It was clearly his best sequence of the fight. Fury was able to catch Usyk with right uppercuts when the Ukrainian tried to get inside, landing them often and with authority. And despite being the much taller man, Fury connected on 46 body punches against Usyk, who has shown a vulnerability to such blows in the past (the most controversial example being the beltline shot he took from Dubois in August 2023). When he shot the uppercut or went to the body, the Brit was at his most accurate.

Yet the biggest factor in Fury's success during those middle rounds was that he came forward. Every time Fury backed up, Usyk seemed to win the exchanges. However, when Fury became the bully, he mostly had his way.

In the rematch, Fury must "be the boss" in there, much like he was in recent fights with Wilder, Dillian Whyte and Derek Chisora. Perhaps that means packing on a few pounds.

THE WEIGHT FACTO

After settling for a draw in his first bout with Wilder in 2018, where he weighed a relatively low 256 pounds and fought mostly on the back foot, Fury came into their rematch weighing a bulky 273 pounds. He pushed Wilder backward from the opening bell and dominated the affair, dropping the American twice before stopping him in the seventh round. Most still consider it the finest performance of his career.

Fury has hinted that he will employ the same strategy in the Usyk rematch. In October, he posted a story on his Instagram account with a photo of himself just before the first bout, where he weighed in at 262 pounds. The caption read, "Was in the shape of my life, but this is not the GK (Gypsy King)". He followed it up with a photo from his third fight with Deontay Wilder, captioned, "This is him, 19:11lbs (277 pounds), busier." It is worth noting, Fury is 6-0 in fights where he weighed 270 or more. Of those six bouts, only

Richard Pelham / Stringer

one (Francis Ngannou, 2023) went the distance. The other five were one-sided dominations from the Brit.

Fury has also said in recent interviews that he will be much more aggressive this time around. He feels that he can't win a decision against the Ukrainian. During the post-fight interview in May, Fury stated, "I believe I won that fight. But his country is at war, so people are siding with the country at war." Most observers felt those comments were delusional, if not disrespectful. But Fury certainly believes them and will thus be going for a knockout in the second fight.

On the surface, being heavier and more aggressive sounds like the perfect game plan for the Usyk rematch. After all, it certainly worked for him against Wilder. But Usyk is a completely different animal. No disrespect to the former WBC titleholder, but other than power, Usyk is levels above Wilder in every conceivable category. "The Bronze Bomber" was mostly a one-armed fighter with major defensive liabilities, and he was never adept at fighting while moving backward. Wilder was also tall, long and orthodox, which made things more comfortable for Fury, stylistically. Simply put, he could almost always see the punches coming. Meanwhile, Usyk is a shorter, craftier southpaw with perhaps the best footwork in boxing today. He fights at angles, he can counterpunch, and he showed a remarkable ability to back Fury up at times. Obviously that will be much harder to do if the Brit does indeed come in heavier for the rematch.

THE X-FACTOR

Much was made of the size difference between Fury and Usyk when the fight was originally signed. Fury had admitted in several interviews over the years that he did not like fighting shorter men. He even cited his 2013 bout against former cruiserweight titleholder Steve Cunningham as the most difficult of his career. Many pundits noted that Cunningham was the same height (6-foot-3) as Usyk, but they seemed to overlook one thing: The American is an orthodox fighter while Usyk is a southpaw, and Fury showed vulnerabilities against the only other ranked lefty he'd fought.

In 2019, Fury had a much tougher than expected fight against Otto Wallin. Coming in, he was a -2500 betting favorite. Yet the Swede was able to land 127 total punches (including 55 body shots) and take Fury the distance. At the time, it was the most anybody had landed in a fight against him. Take Wilder, for example. Despite dropping Fury multiple times over their trilogy, he was never able to land more than 72 punches in any single fight. Former champion Wladimir Klitschko only landed 52 punches on Fury in their 2015 bout. The list goes on.

Here's a key stat to remember: The only opponents who have landed more than 100 punches on Fury were the two southpaws he faced, Wallin (127) and Usyk (170). Perhaps the Gypsy King has two Achilles' heels – shorties and lefties ... and Usyk just happens to be both.

Speaking of the champion: How can he defend his heavyweight crown against a bulkier, seemingly hungrier, more aggressive foe? Once again, details from the first bout provide some insight.

KEYS TO VICTORY: OLEKSANDR USYK

Don't forget, only one man was knocked down back in May. Unlike Fury, Usyk proved he could hurt his opponent. An aggressive, front-footed Tyson Fury might play right into Usyk's game plan for the rematch. Could he catch Fury coming in with one of those looping left hands? There will certainly be opportunities. Accuracy and timing will be key. For Usyk, it's not only a question about which punches to throw against Fury, but also when and where he should throw them.

SHARPSHOOTING

Many expected the smaller man to be the busier fighter against Fury. But Usyk knew that the more he let his hands go, the more opportunities he would give his giant opponent to land counters. So instead, he elected to punch less than Fury (407 total punches compared to 496), but he made his offense count more. Usyk achieved this with elite punch selection and accuracy. The Ukrainian landed nearly 42 percent of his total punches – far more accurate than any of Fury's other notable opponents. He also landed nearly 33 percent of his jabs. Other recent Fury opponents (Wilder, Whyte, Ngannou) landed their jab at about half that rate. In fact, the only other man to land more than 25 percent of his jabs against Fury was – you guessed it – Otto Wallin, the Swedish southpaw.

Defensively, the key adjustment for Usyk will be catching the uppercut. That was Fury's best punch back in May. If the Gypsy King is going to come straight forward this time, that means Usyk needs to move laterally on the outside. He did a good job at getting angles to set up his offense during the first bout, making things awkward for the much taller Fury. But that was often with Fury backed up on the ropes – can Usyk do the same with Fury stalking him? Not only does he need to play matador to the bull, but Usyk must also land something big every now and then to keep Fury honest. That is a task much easier said than done.

OUTSIDE INFLUENCE

Ring officials will play a major role in the rematch as well. Most fans and media vehemently disagreed with Canadian judge Craig Metcalfe's scorecard of the first bout. Despite Fury being dropped in the ninth and losing much of the second half of the bout, Metcalfe scored the fight for the Englishman. As mentioned above, many were displeased with American referee Mark Nelson's performance as well, particularly in the ninth round.

Was Fury "protected" a little back in May? Will he be protected again in December? Well, if the conspiracy theorists on X (formally known as Twitter) needed any fuel for their fire,

Usyk's left was a punishing weapon throughout the first fight, especially Round 9.

Richard Pelham / Stringer

the promotion sure gave it to them when they posted a graphic of the rematch, along with the undercard, on social media in October. The poster read "FURY - USYK," with Fury's name and face first, on the left side, and Usyk on the right. Traditionally, the defending champion would headline promotional materials for the rematch. Some fans wondered if this was a Freudian slip from organizers of the event. Either way, the official fight poster was subsequently released with the names in the correct order.

And with that, all the ingredients are there for a spectacular rematch recipe. A great first bout with a sprinkle of controversy. Promises of a heavier, more aggressive Gypsy King, focused on leaving it out of the judges' hands. A public relations blunder from the promotion that got conspiracy theorists chatting on social media. And lastly, a chance for a quirky Ukrainian southpaw to cement his legacy as one of the all-time greats.

Did I mention the fight is happening right around the holidays? No need to write a wish list for Santa. You're all set, fight fans. RING

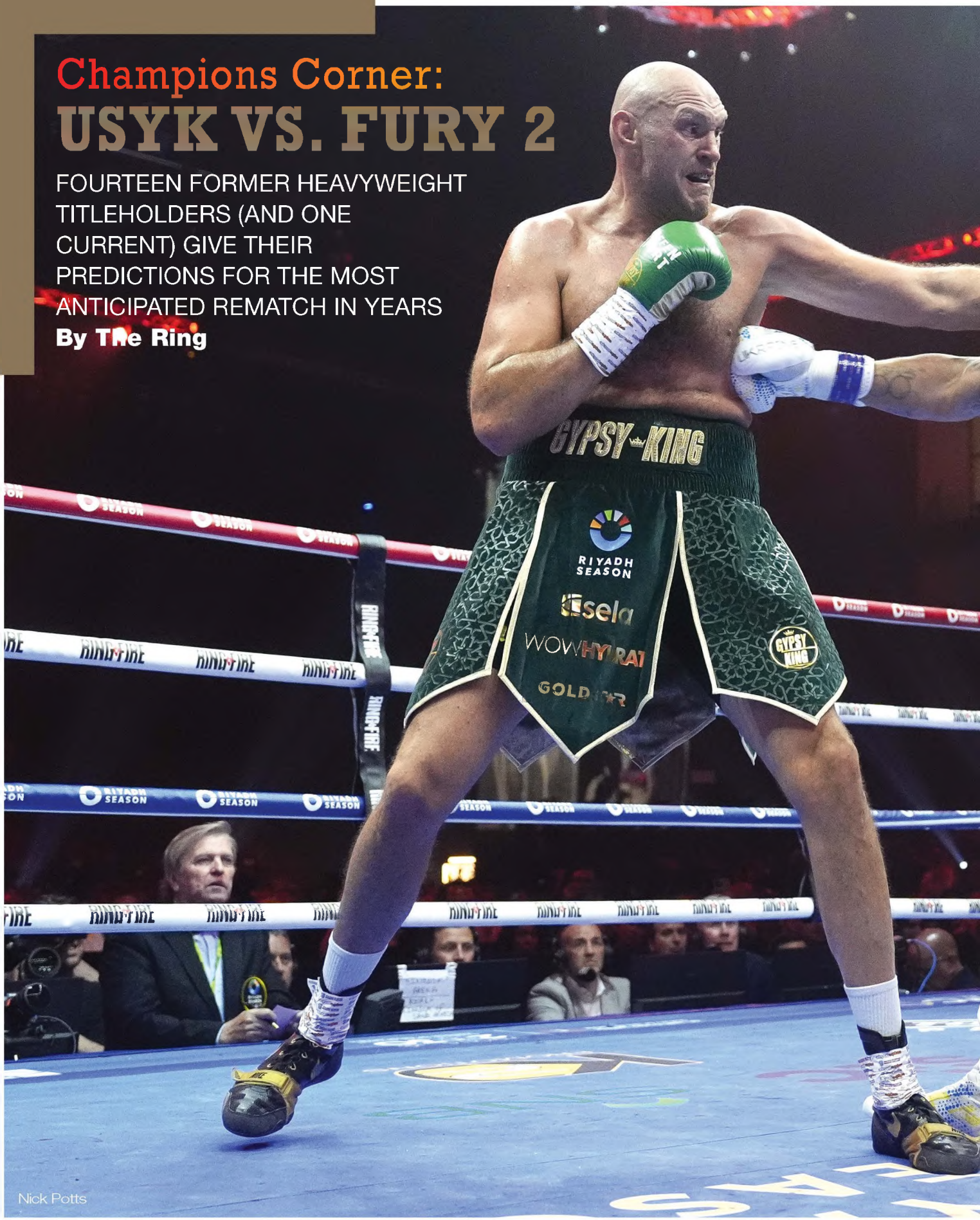
Michael Montero can be found on social media via @MonteroOnBoxing. His show "The Neutral Corner" can be seen on YouTube and heard on audio podcast platforms around the world.

Champions Corner:

USYK VS. FURY 2

FOURTEEN FORMER HEAVYWEIGHT TITLEHOLDERS (AND ONE CURRENT) GIVE THEIR PREDICTIONS FOR THE MOST ANTICIPATED REMATCH IN YEARS

By The Ring



Nick Potts

RIVAL
RING FIRE
RIYADH SEASON

Both heavyweights entered the first bout with confidence. Both have reasons to be confident about the rematch.

The long-awaited first showdown between Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury lived up to the worldwide fanfare that only a heavyweight championship confrontation between elite fighters can deliver.

Much of the hype centered around the historical significance of the bout.

Usyk-Fury I marked the first time unbeaten heavyweights with legitimate claims to the world championship had fought since Mike Tyson and Michael Spinks shared the ring in 1988. The May 18 showdown would also crown the first undisputed heavyweight champion since Lennox Lewis won his rematch with Evander Holyfield in 1999.

However, the clash of Usyk's and Fury's unique styles and mentalities created just as much buzz among boxing insiders and aficionados.

Usyk, the 37-year-old Olympic gold medalist and former undisputed cruiserweight champ, is the consummate professional and technician. The Ukrainian southpaw is always in peak condition, able to outwork and outmaneuver any opponent, but does so with textbook form and balance. Nothing shakes his focus or will to win inside or outside of the ring.

Fury lacks Usyk's amateur foundation, athleticism and sharp technique, but the 6-foot-9 Englishman is one of the most talented giants in heavyweight history. While his dedication and conditioning are occasionally called into question, his ring generalship, versatility, guile and sheer will had always pushed him to victory – that is, until Usyk taught him how to lose.

Can Usyk do it again? Although he seized control of the late rounds and almost had his towering rival out in the ninth, Fury bossed the middle rounds and made the bout legitimately close. Usyk had to sweat out a split decision inside the Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Who's to say that Fury – who was

a beast in return bouts vs. Deontay Wilder and Derek Chisora – can't turn the tables?

The Ring sought out the opinions of one current titleholder and three generations of former heavyweight champions, including five Hall of Famers, to gather their thoughts and predictions ahead of Usyk-Fury II.

LARRY HOLMES

WBC (1978-83) RING (1980-85) IBF (1983-85)

"[The first fight] was a good fight, but Fury lost. I don't root for fighters; I root for the winner. If they go out there and do good but get knocked out … great. Fighters are gonna win and fighters are gonna lose.

"If [Fury] comes back and wins, then that's great, but he only wins a rematch if it's in his hometown. He's going to have the same problems."

Prediction: Usyk wins by unanimous decision

TIM WITHERSPOON

WBC (1984) WBA (1986)

"Usyk just came off a couple of good wins; his momentum is up. I know he's training. And they showed Tyson Fury having fun with his family. I don't think [Fury is] training as hard as Usyk, and that does make a difference. But you never know, he might come back with some new stuff – which I don't think – and upset Usyk.

"I think that Usyk is going to come with fire. He's going to come in good shape. His momentum is still high and he's representing his country, which is behind him 100 percent. I would say Usyk is a mover and Tyson Fury doesn't know how to fight a mover. Why try to hit him in the head? That's what he wants you to do, because you're not going to hit there. So what you do is go for his body, jab him to his body. Hit what's close to you. You've got to be in shape to really fight a mover. If somebody doesn't teach Fury how to fight a mover, I think you might see the same result. Usyk on points by a small margin."

Result: Usyk wins on points

PINKLON THOMAS

WBC (1984-86)

"In the first fight, I predicted Fury would pull it off, because I figured he would outbox this guy and keep him at range. But Usyk is a very, very strong and determined guy.

"I think what you're going to see is the same thing. Tyson Fury has to do some serious boxing to keep this guy off him. It's gonna be a helluva fight. I know Tyson isn't going to lay down; he hasn't laid down for nobody. He'll get up; we've seen that. It's going to be a war. There could be a possible third fight. I've met Fury – he's a good guy. He's very strong and determined. I'm going to give it to Tyson this time."

Result: Fury wins on points

MICHAEL SPINKS

RING (1985-88) IBF (1985-87)

"Although Usyk outpunched and beat Fury last time, although he was a small heavyweight, like myself, I feel Fury will get him back in December. At this point, Fury needs the win to keep his status in boxing. I think the fight will go the distance and Fury will get the three belts that are on the line."

Result: Fury wins on points

LENNOX LEWIS

WBC (1992-94, 1997-2001, 2001-04) WBA (1999-2000) IBF (1999-2001, 2001-02) RING (2002-04)

"I could see Usyk's determination and valor [in the first fight]. He said what he was going to do. He was right on top of Tyson Fury from the beginning. For a fight like that, you've got to be really focused, and I think Tyson Fury wasn't as focused as he should've been. Tyson Fury learned that when a guy's determined and coming after you, you better have other tricks up your sleeve. You can't scare him. You can't intimidate him. He's there on a mission, and that mission is to beat Tyson Fury. He has to be now on a mission to beat Oleksandr Usyk.

"For Usyk, he knew what he

Witherspoon: Doug Pensinger

Fury's size advantage paid off when he used it aggressively.

wanted to do, and he went out and he succeeded in what he predicted was going to happen in the fight. For him to keep that championship, he's got to do the same thing. His country is still at war and they expect him to keep that crown.

"I think it will be a lot closer. It will be almost the same type of fight. Usyk has a lot more confidence now going into the second fight. I think it's going to be another close fight. When I look at [when] me and Holyfield [fought], it was another close fight but it went the same way. So, I see this fight going the same way unless Tyson Fury is going to look at it differently and fight the fight differently. It's up to Tyson Fury to change what never worked and put in what will work. [The] mindset of Tyson Fury is he's going to be, 'I want my undisputed championship,' or, 'I'm the best fighter in the world. Nobody can beat me. Nobody has been born who can beat me.' If he's like that, then he's going to have problems. [Usyk] has a lot stronger mentality when it comes to preparing and dishing out than he has. Usyk on points. Fury has a long way to come back. I'm looking at him and I don't know if he's training. What's he doing? If Tyson Fury doesn't get his jab working in the first round and lets those first rounds slip away, then it's going to be Usyk by points."

Result: Usyk wins on points

MICHAEL MOORER

WBO (1992-93) IBF/WBA (1994) IBF (1996-97)

"I'm going to go with the southpaw, Usyk. I believe Usyk grew up fighting more than Tyson. I guess just being the person dedicated to the sport, he doesn't let his body go out of shape.

"I think he's going to do it again. I picked him the first time. I think the second time, he's going to beat him because he knows how to do it. He knows how to fight and how to win. I think Usyk will probably win on points. Usyk is more a boxer rather than a puncher."

Result: Usyk wins on points

CHRIS BYRD

WBO (2000) IBF (2002-06)

"It's going to be a good fight. To me, it's a pick 'em fight. It's all about

styles. If I lean towards Tyson Fury this time, [the key will be to] keep your height and reach. I understand Usyk is left-handed, he moves around, he's smaller, he's got an advantage with his movement and how he attacks when he comes in. It was close last time, very close. Fury thought he won, but they gave it to Usyk. I see it the same way.

"Neither of them are punchers. You can get knocked out – they're heavyweights – but it's not like they're the main punchers. This is a 12-round fight. At the end of the day, it's two great, talented guys and [the winner will be determined by] who's going to execute the right game plan. To me, Fury [should focus on] the height, reach and distance. How's he getting hit? I don't understand. He's 6-feet-9! With the advantages you have, use 'em! If I'm 6-9 in the ring, you're not hitting me!

"Usyk, on the other hand, [he should] do what he did last time. The movement threw Fury off; he would move outside and then come right in and throw and get his shots off, and he's left-handed, so it's difficult [to fight him].

"That's the kind of fight where it's a chess match; it's a mind game through the whole 12 rounds. Not where we're expecting someone to get cracked like Deontay Wilder, boom, and knock 'em out. This is going 12 rounds again. It's two tactical guys in the ring who are trying to out-think each other. This is a mind game more than a muscle and bully type fight.

"I'm leaning towards Usyk again. When you're a smaller guy coming up, you know what to do, what to think about in the ring. [How is] Fury going to come this time? Is he going to use his weight more, try to bully and be the big guy? [Or will he] sit back and box and go 12 rounds and make it kind of boring?

"Many heavyweights going through their amateur [career] rarely see a southpaw, and when you turn pro, you never see a southpaw. And then one shows up – and a good one. Not a regular southpaw that can fight – we're talking an Olympic gold medalist. [Usyk is] the goods. He dominated at amateur, dominated as a cruiserweight, dominated as a heavyweight. You're not messing with a guy who doesn't know how to adjust in fights. He's smaller and more agile and he's fighting against a guy who's not a big puncher, so it's not like he has a whole lot of threat coming at him with the hardness of punches. He can step off the pedal and take chances, knowing [he] may get hurt a little bit but not knocked out or stretched.

"It's going to be a great fight. It's going to be an intense fight and the kind of fight I love."

Result: Usyk wins on points

WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO

WBO (2000-03) IBF (2006-15)
WBO (2008-15) RING (2009-15)
WBA (2011-15)

"Tyson Fury has shown in the past that indeed he has good boxing skills and outstanding mobility for his size. When facing former cruiserweight champs like Steve Cunningham or Oleksandr Usyk, for some weird reason that mobility turned into a chicken dance.

"I do believe that Tyson Fury's motivation to bounce back and be champ again will be at its highest level, but he can't train his chin. I believe that after just one punch, he will be looking for his pillow and binky. Usyk all the way, again! If my prediction is wrong, then I'll be back for my last dance."

Result: Usyk wins

HASIM RAHMAN

IBF/WBA/WBC (2001)
WBC (2005-06)

"I think Usyk knows what he can do. [Fury] felt his power and [Usyk] knows he can hurt him, and I feel like he can go after him a little quicker now. I think he probably could have and should have got the knockout in the last fight. I personally believe Tyson Fury and Deontay Wilder ruined each other so bad that it's pretty much over for them. I think they took too much out of each other.

"I predicted the first fight also. I just think Usyk is too skilled, and now he knows he can hurt Tyson. Tyson didn't really hurt Usyk in the fight. Usyk understands he can hurt Tyson, and this time I feel like when he drops him he's going to finish him. My prediction is Usyk by seventh-round knockout."

Result: Usyk wins by KO 7

LAMON BREWSTER

WBO (2004-2006)

"I think Usyk has the mental and psychological edge. I believe that the wars Fury has had may have taken too much out of him. Every time that a fighter has a tough fight, we start to lose a little or a lot of our will

Usyk/Fury: Nick Potts - PA Images

and desire. Tyson has achieved a lot during his career, and I believe he has more good days behind him than in front of him. Boxing is a young man's sport, and age catches up with all that stay around too long. Fury has been hit with a lot of big punches; psychologically I don't believe he could still be the same great fighter he once was. I love him as a fighter and he has accomplished a lot, including earning my respect as a fighter, but I just don't believe he still has the hunger and desire that he once had. I just can't see Fury digging deep enough to pull it out. Usyk by decision."

Result: Usyk wins on points

SHANNON BRIGGS

WBO (2006-07)

"I think it's going to be a very interesting fight and I'm really psyched and pumped up about it, because we've never seen Fury in this position, coming off a loss, and he's coming off a loss to a top competitor. Now the key for me [is] who's training hardest and what are they doing in-between fights? I seen something after the fight: Fury was shit-faced drunk in a video clip. Hopefully that's not what he's done with his time off. ... I hope he is disciplined enough to come back in tip-top shape, but I'd still have to say you never know with Fury, because he can fight different styles. We've seen him fight Wilder, boxing, taking it to him. The thing about Fury is he can fight both ways, southpaw and right-handed; he can box and go forward as well. We don't know what Fury is going to show up, but he's coming off a loss and Usyk is a helluva fighter – smart, strong, strong-minded.

"It's going to be a great fight. It's a pick 'em. We don't know, but if my life was on the line, I would have to say Usyk on points. It's gonna be a tough fight. I don't like to go against Fury, because you never know what style he's going to bring or what he's going to do, but he's not fighting a regular man. Usyk's country is war-torn. This man is fighting for his country. He has his country on his back."

Result: Usyk wins on points

BERMANE STIVERNE

WBC (2014-2015)

"I had Fury for the first one. The second one ... Boxing with Usyk is like chess. He does everything by the book. And his angles. It's very hard to fight someone like that, because he's very consistent with his style. Most fighters, how they start is not how they end. He's a southpaw, knows how to fight. He's very athletic, very good boxing I.Q.

"The second one, I'm not sure. ... I would love to see if something happens like in the first fight when Fury hit him with an uppercut and had him wobbled a little bit. I would have loved it if Fury had went forward and pressed on the gas and tried to make more damage. I'd love to see Usyk in trouble and see how he would react. If you look, the rope was holding Fury up because he got wobbled. If it had been AJ or Wilder or if it had been Dubois that hit Fury like that, Fury would have been down. Even though Usyk is not a super puncher, he can cause damage with multiple punches; he's not a one-hit type of heavyweight. We all know when Fury [goes] down, he gets up and fights better. Usyk is consistent. You've got to find a way to trick him or make him not be so consistent. I saw his workouts; his workouts are phenomenal. He's not so big, he's not too small either, but he's right now the king of the division. For me, it's 50-50; it could go either way. I would have to flip a coin."

Result: Undecided

DEONTAY WILDER

WBC (2015-20)

"I wish the best man to win. I don't have a horse in the race. I feel that Fury will start out strong but Usyk will come on and the result will be similar, with Usyk winning again."

Result: Usyk wins on points

JOSEPH PARKER

WBO (2016-18)

"The first fight was very close, but I think the right guy won. I think Tyson was very good at the beginning of the fight. The first few rounds were close, and then he picked it up in the mid-rounds, and then Usyk changed his approach and obviously that ninth round, he caught Fury with a big shot

As he has done before, Fury survived a scare and went the distance.

and that was a big factor in the fight. The first fight was very entertaining and lived up to being a unification fight that we haven't had in 20 years. It lived up to the hype, both guys going back and forth and both guys hurting each other and Usyk dominating towards the end.

"I think for this rematch, everyone is going to favor Usyk going into the fight, but I feel like Tyson has to change a lot of things in his camp. He has to adjust. To be honest, I thought he was going to control the first fight, control the center of the ring and push Usyk the smaller man back, [with] Tyson being the bigger man. But Usyk was able to push him back. I feel with the rematch, Tyson has to control the ring and the center of the ring. Once you have control of the ring, he can adjust the pace of the fight according to what you push. I think it will be another close fight.

"I think the second fight is going to be very similar to the first. I think Usyk is very crafty and very tough. He got caught a few times by Tyson's uppercuts and he was able to bounce back and show the conditioning that he has and how smart of a fighter he is. But I feel if Tyson makes a few adjustments and changes a few things in camp and approaches the fight differently, I feel like it'll be a points win for Tyson. Usyk is very tough and very durable and takes a good punch and gives one back. I always support Tyson, but it's going to be one of those fights where whoever dominates from the beginning is going to get the win. My official prediction would be Tyson on points.

Result: Fury wins on points

DANIEL DUBOIS

IBF (2024-current)

"The first fight was a great fight. That was one of the greatest fights I've seen in the modern era – an all-time fight. Good back-and-forth fight. They both had their moments and Usyk came out on top. Fair play to the man; he's climbed his way up the heavyweight ranks.

"I think Fury, hopefully, pulls it off. I think he'll take it a bit more serious this time and he'll prepare a lot better and really put in the work for this one, and he'll come out on top this time. It could be a stoppage. [Usyk] is a slick boxer, but Fury has the size on him; he could pull it out the bag and stop him.

"I'd love to have a rematch with Usyk. That's unfinished business and I'll definitely get my revenge this time around. Whoever wins, I'll gladly take 'em on. I'll hopefully be out there to call out the winner."

Prediction: Fury wins RING

Anson Wainwright and Tom Gray contributed to this article.

EVERYBODY WINS

Israil Madrimov troubled Terence Crawford.

Serhii Bohachuk punished Vergil Ortiz Jr.

TODAY'S BOXING BUSINESS IS OFTEN UNKIND TO FIGHTERS WHO TAKE AN "L," BUT **ISRAIL MADRIMOV VS. SERHII BOHACHUK** IS A CLEAR WINNER FOR FANS **By Steve Kim**

Before Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury engage in their rematch at the Kingdom Arena, an attractive junior middleweight contest will take place between Israil Madrimov and Serhii Bohachuk. Both have entertaining styles. Both are rated in the top 10 in the division by Ring Magazine. But what makes this fight a true rarity is that it features two boxers coming off losses.

In an era where fighters are protected and coddled, these two are going right back into deep waters.

Back in the summer, both Madrimov and Bohachuk suffered hard-luck defeats in competitive fights against elite opposition. However, they performed in a manner that proved there is winning in losing.

On August 3, at BMO Stadium in Los Angeles, Madrimov was paired with Terence Crawford, who for years has been near the top of pound-for-pound lists. After finally consolidating all the belts of the welterweight class, Crawford had picked Madrimov (who had just captured the WBA 154-pound belt in March by stopping Magomed Kubranov in five rounds) for his junior middleweight debut.

The consensus was that the gifted Crawford would simply be too good and experienced for Madrimov, who had just 11 pro bouts under his belt coming into this contest. This was supposed to be a showcase for "Bud," who wanted to state his case for eventually fighting super middleweight champion Canelo Alvarez.

But a funny thing happened on this warm summer night. Madrimov didn't go by the script. Using his deft in-and-out movement and sharp lead right hands, he troubled Crawford throughout the fight. It was a tense chess match that saw both boxers have sporadic moments, neither of them ever truly controlling the action for long stretches.

After 12 rounds, it was Crawford winning by the scores of 115-113 (twice) and 116-112. You could say it was the toughest fight he's had in his accomplished career. More than a few observers believed that Madrimov deserved to retain his belt.

Bohachuk is The Ring's No. 6-rated junior middleweight.

Vadim Kornilov, who manages Madrimov, opined: "I thought if he was fighting any other fighter, and the show wasn't about Crawford, then Madrimov would've gotten the win. He was the champion. The guy that is trying to take the title away should be taking the title away and not just hanging in there. It shouldn't matter who he is, and it shouldn't matter that he was a champion in another weight class."

It was a bitter defeat, but with it came

Madrimov is The Ring's No. 2-rated junior middleweight.

a great deal of invaluable seasoning. "I think he did really well, but that experience definitely will make him better," said Kornilov.

A week later at the Michelob Ultra Arena in Las Vegas, Bohachuk engaged in one of the most memorable battles of 2024 as he and Vergil Ortiz went back and forth over 12 fast-paced rounds. Despite scoring two knockdowns, it was Bohachuk coming out on the short end of the stick by the scores of 113-113 and 114-112 (twice).

Once again, opinion was split on just who really should've had their hand raised in victory. Including one very important voice who has become quite influential.

"His Excellency, Turki Alalshikh, came up to us and said he thought Bohachuk won the fight and said, 'I want to put you on the December show,'" recalled Tom Loeffler, the head of 360 Promotions, which represents Bohachuk. "So we knew we would be slotted for that show. Then when it was proposed we fight Madrimov, we knew it would be a high-profile fight. It didn't take Bohachuk long; he agreed the same day to fight him."

Bohachuk relishes the opportunity: "I'm happy because I have a strong opponent. He's a good guy. He's strong. He's a good boxer. It's a good fight for me. I can show him an interesting fight."

On the opposing end, there really wasn't all that much hesitation to take this assignment.

"[Madrimov] had the opportunity of having an easier training camp and a little easier of a fight, but obviously with His Excellency there was an opportunity. We had to seize it," explained Kornilov, who conferred with Madrimov and his trainer, Joel Diaz, in making the decision. "It's basically about staying in the big picture."

Both sides should be given credit. Yes, they are getting paid well, but they are also risking a second consecutive defeat. But with great risk comes great reward.

"Nobody makes you do it," Kornilov made clear. "I mean, you can get another date if you want and choose another option. It was kind of like, do you want to be co-main event here in a tougher fight, or do you want to consider something else? It's really up to us."

Under any circumstance, Madrimov-Bohachuk, is a high-quality matchup. Hopefully, it sets a precedent for the future. Losses shouldn't kill the momentum of a career.

"It's a great fight, a great fight for the sport of boxing. It's a great fight for both Bohachuk and Madrimov," stated Loeffler. "These are the types of fights that boxing fans deserve and the sport needs." RING

READY TO RE-ROLL

FOLLOWING HIS MOST DEVASTATING DEFEAT, ANTHONY JOSHUA SAYS THAT WHATEVER PATH HE FOLLOWS – WHETHER IT'S A RISKY REMATCH WITH DANIEL DUBOIS OR A SUPERFIGHT VS. TYSON FURY – HE'LL DO SO WITHOUT FEAR

By John Evans

The days after a defeat can be a lonely time for a fighter. Friends and family slip back into their everyday routines and the house and calendar are suddenly empty. After spending months talking about the fight and what they are going to do, the fighter is left alone with their thoughts, dealing with the consequences of what actually happened.

It is an experience that boxers at every level go through at some point in their career but, for somebody as used to being at the center of attention as Anthony Joshua is, the contrast must be particularly stark.

Hours after being knocked out by Daniel Dubois in the fifth round of their IBF heavyweight title fight, and as the sporting world hurried to write his obituary, Joshua sat down quietly and began trying to make sense of what had happened at Wembley Stadium.

The two-time unified heavyweight champion came to one immediate conclusion.

"That I'm probably a lot stronger mentally than I was before," Joshua said, "Like, for example, you go through your first breakup. It hurts you. Then you get another relationship and you approach it a bit differently and, all of a sudden now, you become immune to the pain of breakups in a relationship.

"So, when I first lost, it was different. Then I lost again; it was different. Now I just felt like, 'You know what? It's in the past, and the only thing I can predict is the future. I can't change the past, but I can change my future. So, don't worry about that.'

"I tried my best, I got beat up, and we'll go again, basically. Don't overthink the situation."

In the past, those quiet moments of reflection have led Joshua to some definite decisions.

Once the dust had settled on his stunning loss to Andy Ruiz in 2019, Joshua knew that he had to get the Mexican back into the ring as quickly as possible, which he did, scoring a one-sided unanimous decision over the portly underdog six months later.

After losing to Oleksandr Usyk in September 2021, Joshua ended his successful partnership with Rob McCracken and hired Robert Garcia for the rematch. A second defeat to the brilliant Ukrainian led to a root-and-branch rethink of his entire approach, and he took himself to Dallas to evolve his style with Derrick James.

This time, there are more threads to pull together.

Getting the chance to even the score with Dubois would be a matter of professional and personal pride for the 35-year-old Joshua, but another loss to the reborn Londoner would deal a terminal blow to his career.

The towering figure of Tyson Fury also looms large.

On December 21, Usyk and Fury will renew hostilities in Saudi Arabia and

Joshua insists that his most devastating setback has only made him stronger.

ADRIAN DENNIS

– should Usyk repeat the outstanding victory he scored in May – the Ukrainian would likely target a unification rematch with Dubois and the path would be clear for a long overdue showdown between the most accomplished British heavyweights of their era.

Just how keen the enigmatic Fury would be to quickly jump straight back into such a big fight needs to be considered. And given that Joshua is at his best when he is active, he surely won't want to risk sitting on the sidelines until next summer.

If Joshua bypasses a Dubois rematch but Fury then beats Usyk, where does AJ go?

From the outside, choosing the correct path looks like a difficult, layered decision. Privately, Joshua made his feelings plain.

"I think [it is complicated] probably for the team, because they're looking at every option. Look, I'm a business as well as a fighter, so they're looking at every option business-wise, but I've just said that the rematch makes sense," he said.

"Listen, it's a championship fight. I believe that when it's all said and done, competing with the best will always hold me in good stead in the long run in terms of records and what I've done as a fighter.

"No worries for me. But then I think they're speaking with the Saudis on dates and all that contractual stuff [for the Dubois rematch]."

If Joshua is dealing with the devastating loss to Dubois in a pragmatic, matter-of-fact way, it sounds as if he is applying the same attitude to his business side.

Part of becoming a great warrior is choosing which battles to fight.

For someone who has achieved all that Joshua has, the thought of passing up the opportunity for revenge and hoping to challenge the loser of a fight may not sit well. But at this stage of his career, waiting to see how Fury fares could well be the most sensible choice he could make.

"But if I go and knock out Fury, I would be the greatest thing," he countered.

Joshua's fourth pro loss won't change him into a risk-averse fighter.

"It's just perception and timing. It's a great opportunity to fight Fury. It's been one that's been calling for a long time.

"Let's say that people were to say, 'Let's wait until we see who the loser is.' But if the fight was announced, it would be, 'This is a megafight.'"

Much has been made of the 60 seconds Joshua spent in his corner before being sent out for the fateful fifth round with Dubois.

With the words of trainers Ben Davison and Lee Wylie ringing in his ears, Joshua went out to "roll the dice."

Yes, a calm Dubois capitalized on his aggression to land the fight-ending right hand, but, by that point, Joshua had already been dropped three times. The damage was already done.

The partnership with Derrick James provided Joshua with a sound platform to rebuild from after his loss to Usyk.

He boxed Jermaine Franklin and Robert Helenius behind a shield, shoulders rolled up. He was solid but – until he uncorked the right hand that separated Helenius from his senses – unspectacular, and the clamor that the "old A.J" was gone forever began to get louder.

In another post-fight moment of clarity, Joshua decided to switch his training operations closer to home and began working with Davison at his Performance Centre in Essex.

He loosened up during a patient, cruel dismantling of Otto Wallin and boxed with total freedom when demolishing Francis Ngannou.

He tried to use a similarly relaxed style against the rampaging Dubois and paid a heavy price for it.

Joshua insists that the opinions of those outside his trusted inner circle played no part in his decision to adopt a more confident approach. The intention was always to return to his aggressive self, but to do so with a little more sense.

"Wallin and Ngannou was definitely a different approach. I was with different coaches at the time. Still the same

person, still had my same fears, my same confidence, everything," he said.

"Physically, that's just a small part of it. Mentally, I've always been the same, to be honest."

"Even with my past fights, I just said to the coaches, 'Look, the past is the past. It doesn't matter what anyone says. It just matters what we do from here.'

"I've got my war council, my board of fighters or fight people that I sit down with and talk boxing, but it wasn't about that. I just felt that when you get to a certain level, your instinctual ability can take you so far.

"I used to fight a lot on my instincts and I realized that it was getting tough, tough, tough at the top... so I wanted to learn how to improve as a fighter. How to box. Move to the right, left hooks coming. Move to the left, right hands coming. How to counterpunch and practice these things.

"And then I just got that, so I was like, 'I'm good now. Let's rock and roll. Let's just put it all together. The boxing, the instincts. Give it a go again, roll the dice again.'"

Joshua can box. He understands the mechanics and technicalities of the sport and has spent thousands of hours drilling and repeating routines and techniques until they became second nature.

If ever there was a time to fall back on that learned behavior, it was during those dangerous rounds with Dubois. But when faced with a crisis, Joshua's natural reaction wasn't to tuck his chin, glue his hand to his cheek and buy himself some time. He didn't hold. The instincts he once tried to suppress took over. He stood and fought.

The worst has now happened, but whoever and whenever Joshua fights next, he insists he will go into it with a stronger mindset than before.

"I just know I'm stronger mentally, and I don't have that fear. I just questioned myself. I'm like, 'Where am I? Do I really want to do it? Am I good enough? Am I this, or whatever?' And the answers were, 'You know what? I feel like I'm a lot stronger mentally than I ever was before,' because the way I'm dealing with it is one of thicker skin.

"In terms of styles and approaches, it's hard because I can't train myself. I've got coaches to train me but, 100 percent, we have to work together, not against each other. If my coach is telling me to move back and I think it's better to move forward, we can't work against each other. We just have to find a middle ground. So I will trust myself. I don't know what type of style I'll use, but I just know in my heart, I just feel like it made me more thirsty for action.

"I didn't get disheartened by the situation. I was sitting there like, 'Let's go again.'"

ADVICE FROM A FOE

After losing a unanimous decision to Oleksandr Usyk in 2021, Joshua turned in an improved performance during their rematch, but the Ukrainian once again accelerated away down the stretch and fought his way to a split decision victory.

Joshua thinks Usyk didn't make any wholesale changes to his own style ahead of the return, but instead waited to see what changes the Brit had made and then reacted accordingly.

"Yeah, that's what I felt," Joshua said. "I felt that there was a bit more room for me to do what I was doing. But what he did, he took off in the later rounds. Even though he was giving me room to work, he's assessing, because obviously [he's thinking], 'He's going to be more aggressive. He's going to be more this.' He's now gauging and seeing what's going on.

"Once he'd now figured the puzzle out, he then took off in the last 25 percent of the fight. Rounds 9, 10, 11, 12."

Fury has stopped John McDermott, Derek Chisora and Deontay Wilder in rematches. He performed well during the undisputed title fight with Usyk in May and looked to have established an element of control until being badly hurt in the ninth. Fury won't need to change much in order to even the score, and Joshua couldn't offer any suggestions as to what those alterations may be.

"Only he knows," he said.

"It's hard for me to say. I don't know. His coach, they all know. I can't say. I've tried it. I've tried boxing, I've tried being aggressive. Both of them didn't work, so I don't know what will work for him. I suppose it's [which] Usyk shows up."

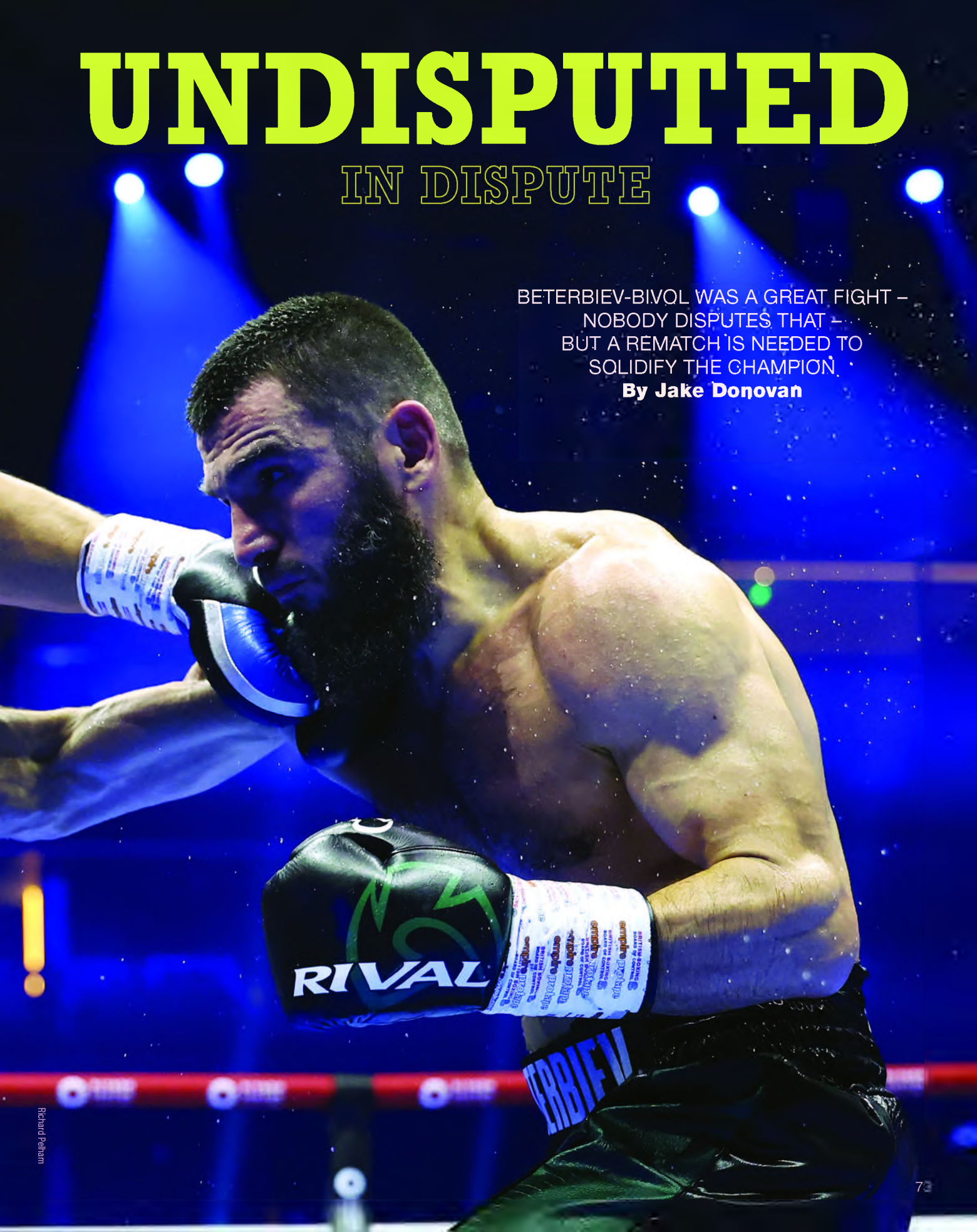
(LEFT) Bradley Collyer - PA Images; Nick Potts - PA Images

BIVOL
ARTUR
BETERBIEV

UNDISPUTED
IN DISPUTE

BETERBIEV-BIVOL WAS A GREAT FIGHT – NOBODY DISPUTES THAT – BUT A REMATCH IS NEEDED TO SOLIDIFY THE CHAMPION

By Jake Donovan



Richard Pelham

Artur Beterbiev and Dmitry Bivol gave us everything we could have asked for in an undisputed championship. The pair of unbeaten titleholders fought at an elite skill level. There were momentum shifts and key adjustments made by both. In the end, a Ring Magazine and fully unified light heavyweight champion was crowned, the first in more than two decades.

Even better, the fight was compelling enough to create demand for a rematch. It's a good thing, since the aftermath suggested Beterbiev's undisputed championship reign comes with its share of dispute.

To some, Beterbiev (21-0, 20 KOs) surged at the right time to rightfully collect all the 175-pound chips on October 12 at Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The unbeaten two-time Russian Olympian – now based in Canada – entered as the lineal, IBF, WBC and WBO champ. He left the ring with Bivol's WBA title and the vacant Ring Magazine championship after a majority decision win.

"When I first won the IBF belt, this dream to become undisputed champion has always been with me," Beterbiev told The Ring. "I always remained confident that this day was coming.

"Now it's happened and I am very happy."

Unfortunately, the night also left many viewers – and most of Bivol's team – very upset.

A healthy portion of the sport believed that Bivol (23-1, 12 KOs) was denied his rightful victory. His strong start was viewed as enough to overcome Beterbiev's late rally. Had the three judges agreed with the court of public opinion, Bivol would have extended the sport's second-longest active title reign among male beltholders.

Instead, his seven-year run as WBA light heavyweight titlist ended without getting credit for a win on any of the three scorecards. Judge Manuel Oliver Palomo (114-114) awarded six rounds apiece to each boxer. His card was overruled by judges Glenn Feldman (115-113) and Pawel Kardyni (116-112).

The card turned in by Poland's Kardyni was viewed by most as too wide and not indicative of what took place in Saudi Arabia. It has become the focal point for a protest filed by Bivol's team, a tactic they plan to leverage to secure an immediate rematch.

"Due to the fact that this fight was quite controversial, we proceeded with a rematch request and protest of the decision with all of the sanctioning bodies," Vadim Kornilov, Bivol's career-long manager, told The Ring. "And we are still working on the possibility of a review of the 116-112 scorecard."

Matchroom Boxing Chairman Eddie Hearn stood by his man as well.

"We saw one of the greatest fights and examples of our sport," Hearn insisted while at the podium for the post-fight press conference. "I don't want to disrespect Artur Beterbiev, because he's an incredible fighter. But I find it sickening that after a lifetime of hard work, Dmitry Bivol is not the undisputed champion. He won that fight.

"I struggled to find anyone who didn't score the fight to Bivol. I'm not saying it's a robbery. But I don't see how you can give Beterbiev six rounds in that fight."

Bivol's legal team filed a rematch request with all four major sanctioning bodies. Attorney Patrick English likened the outcome to another undisputed championship co-promoted by one of his other clients, Main Events.

Lennox Lewis was universally regarded as the victim of a horrifically scored split decision draw in his March 1999 heavyweight championship versus Evander Holyfield.

"The result of that bout was among the most controversial in history, with a highly disputed draw," English stated in his plea to the IBF, WBA, WBC and WBO to order Beterbiev-Bivol II. "Boxing fans demanded a rematch. The fighters wanted a rematch. I filed an appropriate petition with the ratings organizations for a rematch."

Some will argue that it has merely produced lively debate.

A post-fight study conducted by The Ring's Anson Wainwright revealed that just nine of 21 experts polled viewed Bivol as the outright winner. Beterbiev deserved the nod according to just five – less than 20 percent. The remaining seven viewed their summit meeting either as a draw or were simply "undecided" on who deserved to win.

The fight was that close. Close enough to where they both moved up in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings after the fight. Beterbiev moved up to No. 4, while Bivol holds the No. 5 spot.

However close the fight was, it should not have been, if you ask Bivol himself – the one member of his team to offer zero excuses or public outrage.

"In [a] fight like this, everything needed to be perfect," Bivol told The Ring. "I did my job, but did I do my best? I don't know that I can say that. I always feel like I can do better, even after every win. No fight has been perfect, I always [strive] for that.

"Now, I [will focus on] my future. I still have plans to become undisputed."

Fortunately for Bivol, everyone involved seems on board to deliver. Even his longtime divisional rival.

"Yes, of course, I am interested in rematch," Beterbiev said on the subject. "If that is what everyone wants and what His Excellency wants, then we can do it."

"His Excellency" is Turki Alalshikh, chairman of Saudi Arabia's General Entertainment Authority. To boxing fans, he is the leader of a massive movement to bring together all the fights the sport has missed out on for years. Events by Queensberry Promotions, Matchroom Boxing, BOXXER, Top Rank and Golden Boy Promotions are all sponsored by Riyadh Season.

Alalshikh's group recently celebrated the one-year anniversary of its launch. In that time, the sport has crowned undisputed champions at heavyweight

Richard Pelham

and light heavyweight. Neither division has boasted a fully undisputed king in 25 and 22 years, respectively. If not for a Beterbiev injury that delayed the original June 1 date, those voids would have been filled within a two-week span.

Oleksandr Usyk joined Holyfield as the only two fighters in history to claim undisputed championship status at both cruiserweight and heavyweight.

His rematch with Tyson Fury will take place on December 21 because the first fight was that good, that close and that relevant.

Most importantly, it will take place because both fighters and the event handlers wanted it bad enough.

The same is true for Beterbiev-Bivol.

For Beterbiev, it's a failsafe to avoid a meaningless IBF mandatory title defense versus Michael Eifert (13-1, 5 KOs). The Ring has confirmed that Beterbiev – who is promoted by Top Rank – can file for a one-time exception, which would then be reviewed by the IBF Board of Governors.

Beterbiev won't have much time to celebrate holding all the light heavyweight titles if Bivol gets his way.

Such measures are normally taken when fighters want to unify in lieu of an ordered, lower-profile affair. There is nothing left to unify at light heavyweight, but Bivol remains the only relevant option for Beterbiev. Hopefully the IBF realizes this fact.

Hall of Fame promoter Bob Arum has told reporters that he believes both fighters will first take separate bouts. Such a course, he believes, would put the second act in play by October 2025.

The group that would fund the fight wants to stick to its original plan of an immediate rematch and striking while the iron is hot.

Age is also a factor.

Beterbiev will be 40 in January. His career has been slowed by injuries, including one that caused a four-month delay of this very fight, which was already seven years in the making.

Bivol has the advantage in that category; he will turn 34 on December 18, three days before Usyk-Fury II. He also has the support of the sport's most influential figure.

"This was one of the great fights of the last 20 years, I think," Alalshikh said after the fight. "But I don't think the result was fair, in my opinion. The two fighters are like my brothers, but I think Bivol won two rounds more.

"I will focus and I will try to do the rematch. If they accept, we will do it." RING

Jake Donovan is a senior writer for The Ring and vice president of the Boxing Writers Association of America. Follow @JakeNDaBox.

Teofimo Lopez Sr. and Jr.

Photographs by Wojtek Urbanek • Text by Thomas Hauser

Four years ago, Teofimo Lopez Jr. was a rising star in the boxing world. He had beaten Vasiliy Lomachenko to unify the IBF, WBA, WBO and Ring Magazine lightweight titles and was near the top of most pound-for-pound rankings. A poll of 40 industry experts published in The Ring labeled him a clear favorite over Gervonta Davis, Devin Haney, Ryan Garcia and (should there be a rematch) Lomachenko. Teofimo couldn't match their social media followings. But once the bell rings, Instagram followers can't fight.

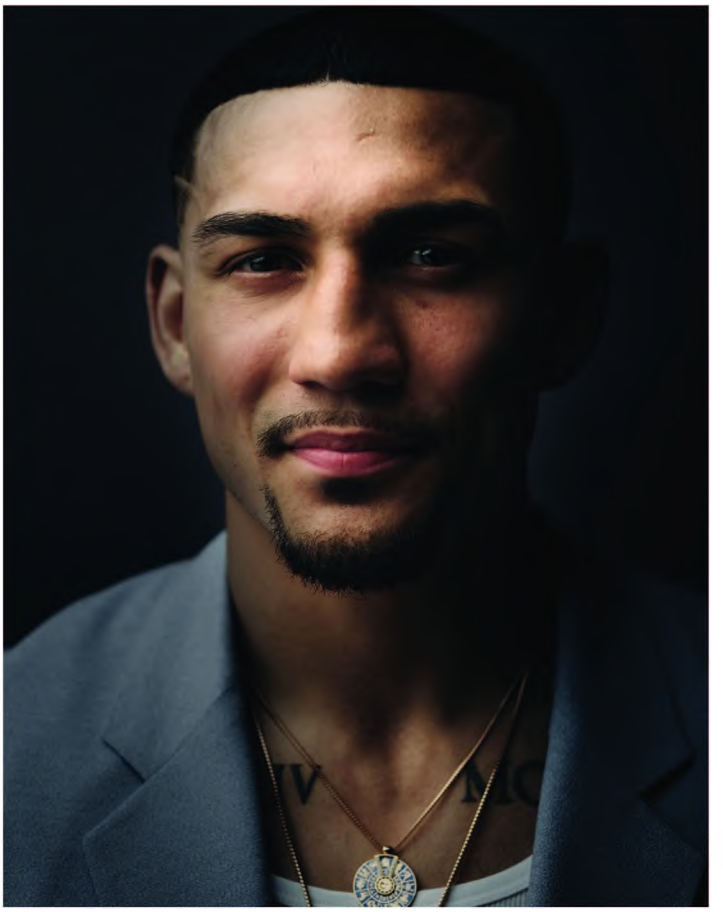
"Teofimo is riding high right now," one voter responded. "And his size gives him an edge."

"Teofimo might not be as good as we think he is," said another. "Or maybe he's better."

The sky was the limit.

Then Lopez faltered. He lost a decision to 9-to-1 underdog George Kambosos Jr. A victory over Josh Taylor was sandwiched between desultory wins against Pedro Campa, Sandor Martin, Jamaine Ortiz and Steve Claggett. Teofimo is currently the WBO and Ring 140-pound champion by virtue of his victory over Taylor. But his personal life has been tumultuous. He got married, had a son, and has had to deal with marital strife. He talked openly about suicide. Too often, he has avoided going in tough in the ring and sometimes has not gone in at all. He has quarreled incessantly with Top Rank (which did a good job of building him as a fighter).

Throughout his ring career, Teofimo has been trained by his father. While the bond between father and son is strong, there have been rough patches between them. At the annual Boxing Writers Association of America dinner earlier this year, Teofimo Jr. posed for Wojtek Urbanek. Then his father was invited to join the photo session. The image that resulted (opposite page) is evocative of *The Godfather* or a father preparing his son for war.

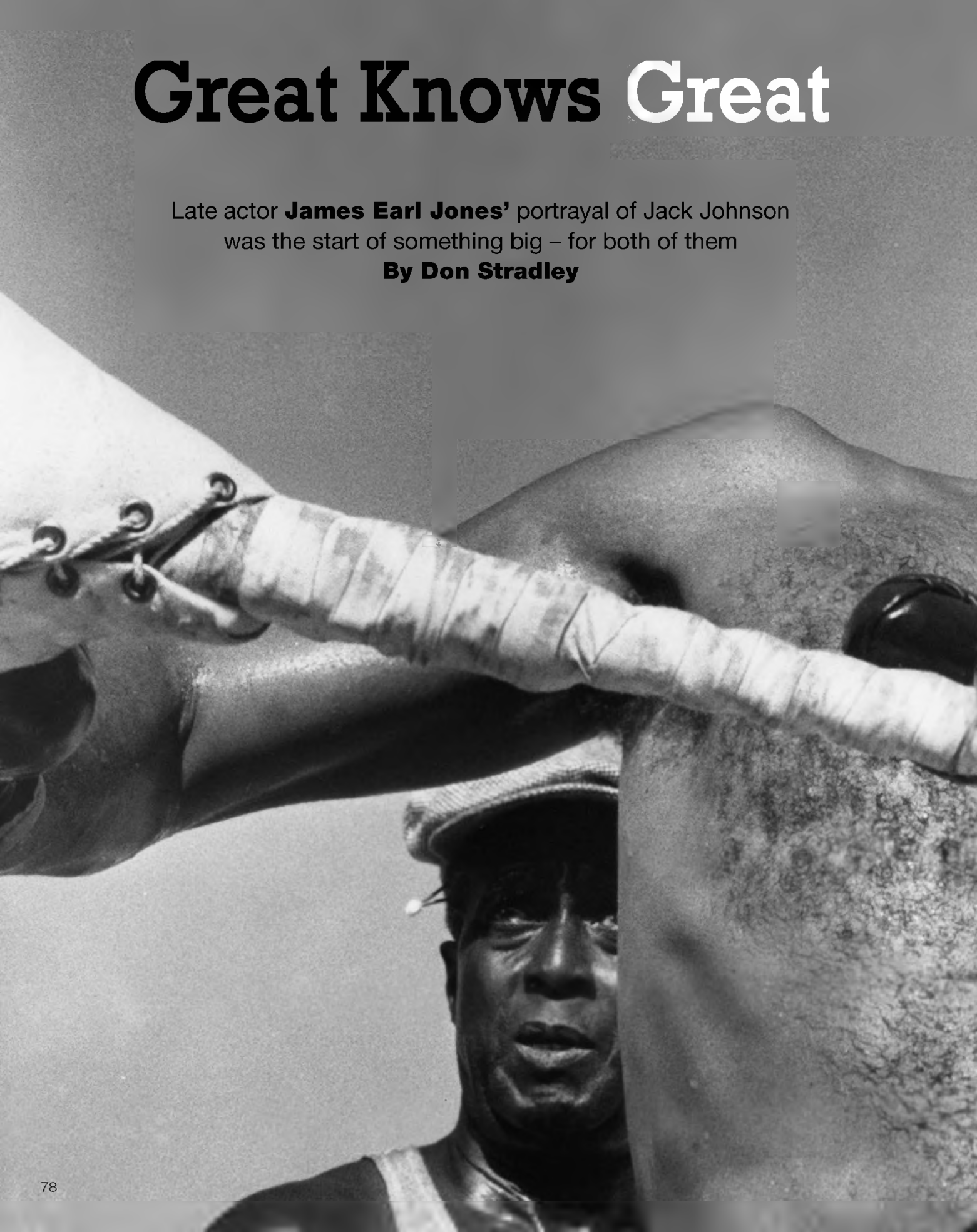


© Wojtek Urbanek

Great Knows Great

Late actor **James Earl Jones'** portrayal of Jack Johnson was the start of something big – for both of them

By Don Stradley



The real Jack Johnson (inset) needed the "reel" Jack Johnson to reintroduce his legend to the public.

Archive Photos;(Inset) Bettmann

In the autumn of 1968, the talk of Broadway was a new show called *The Great White Hope*. It was an extravagant piece of theater with a cast of 65 players. The ensemble's aim was to portray the atmosphere of six decades earlier, when men wore straw hats and women seemed perpetually under the shade of a parasol. At the center of it all was James Earl Jones. In the role of a lifetime, he played a Black boxing champion enduring the hostilities of white America. Jones, who died recently at age 93, filled the stage with swagger and contempt, exuberance and anguish. It was, wrote critic William Mootz, "a performance of truly heroic proportions."

The drama by Howard Sackler was based loosely on the life and times of Jack Johnson, who reigned as heavyweight champion from 1908 to 1915. Johnson's career sank after his conviction for violating the Mann Act (transporting women across state lines for immoral purposes). Facts were blurred and names were changed for the play – Johnson became "Jack Jefferson," and his many wives and mistresses were condensed into one woman, played by Jane Alexander – but Sackler's version was reasonably close to the truth. However, it was Jones who gave the production its fire.

"He is a giant of a man," wrote Mootz, "and an artist among actors. His Jefferson is a genial hulk at first, then gradually develops into a caged, hate-filled tiger, hopelessly battling to establish some kind of foothold in a world bent on destroying him. The role offers virtuosic opportunities every turn of the way, and Jones misses none of them."

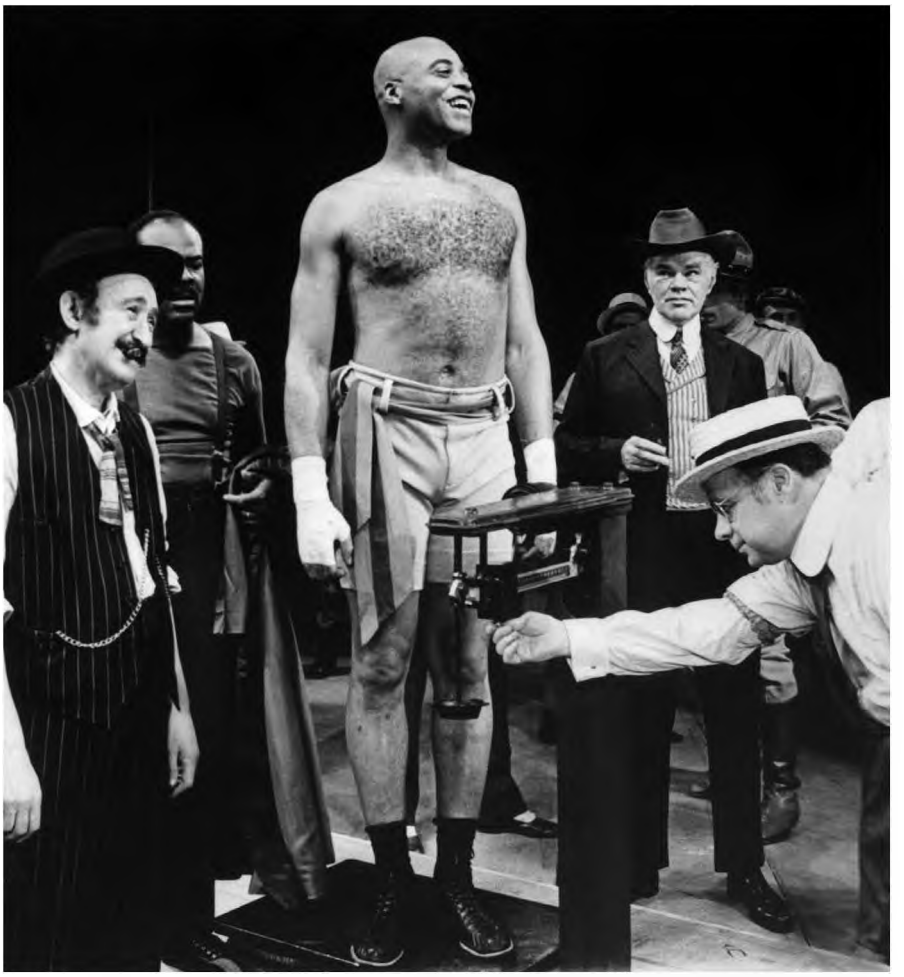
"Seldom has there been a performance as overwhelmingly powerful," wrote George Oppenheimer from Newsday.

The role of Jack Johnson made James Earl Jones.

You could also say that James Earl Jones made Jack Johnson.

When the play premiered in 1967 at Washington, D.C.'s Arena Stage, Johnson was a long-forgotten character. Even among boxing fans, he was a vague figure from the past, no more relevant than a faded postcard from the 1915 World's Fair. The Ring magazine founder Nat Fleischer, still alive and stirring the pot in those days, often cited Johnson as the best heavyweight he'd ever seen. But for most fans, the past belonged in the past. Compared to Jackie Robinson being the first Black player in Major League Baseball, Johnson being the first Black heavyweight champion seemed insignificant, especially when you learned there'd been Black champions before him in other weight classes. If you studied him a bit and learned that Johnson had a distinct unsavory side, you'd write him off as an unappealing character. Sackler spruced him up for public consumption. Jones turned him into a full-blown symbol of the Black struggle.

"I think we knew during rehearsals that we were involved in a significant theater experience," Jones wrote in his 1994 memoir. "But I was completely unprepared for the critical praise, the later fame, and the thunderous response of our audiences."



Jones holds court during the stage production of *The Great White Hope*.

The Great White Hope hit the Great White Way like a lightning bolt. Since most theater patrons knew nothing about boxing history, the play was a revelation, a perfect fit for the mood of the times.

Johnson had been dead for 22 years but was suddenly a Civil Rights totem. Posters and photos of him appeared in college dorm rooms around the country, alongside images of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King Jr. Just months earlier, John Carlos and Tommie Smith had raised their fists in the Black Power salute at the Olympic Games. Now Jack

Bettmann

Johnson joined them posthumously. He'd never been especially outspoken about Black rights and preferred to surround himself with a white entourage, yet he was newly perceived as retro Black Power. Muhammad Ali, in the middle of his exile after refusing the military draft, praised Johnson as "an inspiration."

Not everyone fell in line. Fleischer told a syndicated columnist, "I'm no drama critic, but I know that if Jack Johnson could see the way he's pictured in *The Great White Hope*, he'd burst out laughing." Barney Nagler of the New York Morning Telegraph was amused that Johnson was "drawn as such a sympathetic character. He was anything but that." Nagler, who had known Johnson in the 1930s, suggested the play was too broad. "A dramatist is allowed literary license," he said, "and in this case, Johnson comes out as something that he wasn't."

Nagler's main beef was that Johnson was hardly a good or noble person.

"He was more colorful than good," Nagler said.

Indeed, Johnson's less attractive traits were airbrushed from the play. But in 1968, he was the Black man of the moment.

And that newfound interest spilled over into the next several decades. *The Great White Hope* was made into a movie, while Johnson was the subject of books, documentaries, and even an album by Miles Davis called simply, "Jack Johnson." Davis' scorching music served as the soundtrack for a movie project from Bill Cayton, the fight film collector and future co-manager of Mike Tyson. Cayton's film featured a narrator pretending to be Johnson, but it was actually an actor (Brock Peters) seeming to copy Jones' bassy voice and delivery.

Ironically, Jones played Johnson/Jefferson with a southern drawl, what some critics described as "southern slop." Yet on the rare recordings of Johnson that are available, he speaks with a clipped, almost British accent, an affectation by a man who'd grown up poor in Texas and wanted to sound posh. Moreover, Johnson used proper English, not the "Here I is!" nonsense of Sackler's script.

Equally grating was Jones' choice to belly-laugh throughout his performance, producing a deep, rumbling sound that would've seemed gauche to Johnson, a pretentious man who sipped beer through a straw. Yet for the time being and for years to come, when people thought of Jack Johnson, they were probably thinking of James Earl Jones.

The Great White Hope won the Pulitzer Prize, the Tony Award and the New York Drama Critics' Circle award for the 1968-69 Broadway season. Jones won a Tony for Best Actor in a Play, while the eventual film earned him Academy Award and Golden Globe nominations. Jones was 38, had been acting for 14 years, and was on top of the world. Or so it seemed.

Being part of a show business phenomenon brought Jones in touch with "a lot of crazies," he said. "They thought I was the solution to their problem." Uncomfortable with his newfound popularity, Jones went into therapy and seclusion for a year. If playing Johnson on stage and film was so traumatic, we can only wonder what Johnson experienced while living the part.

In his memoir, Jones refers to *The Great White Hope* as Johnson's "comeback." And it was. Has any other fighter enjoyed such a resurgence? Jake LaMotta experienced something similar when Robert De Niro played him in *Raging Bull*, but LaMotta was a cult figure of little cultural importance. And Ali, with his global fame, needed no help from Will Smith. What Jones did for Johnson was something like a religious ritual, a passion play evoking old spirits. Thanks to Jones, Jack Johnson rose from the dead and walked again, up and down Broadway and to places where he once hadn't been allowed entry. In 2018, nearly a century after his conviction, Johnson was pardoned by President Donald Trump.

Meanwhile, the success of *The Great White Hope* launched Jones into decades of stardom on stage, screen and television. Though most may know him as the voice of Darth Vader in *Star Wars*, Jones' list of credits is long and impressive. In a way, he owed his career to Johnson. And Johnson, who has grown in stature like no other fighter from his era, would have to say he owed a lot to Jones.

Then again, as arrogant as Johnson was, he might've hated Jones' performance.

When Ali was making his comeback in October of 1970 to face Jerry Quarry in Atlanta, he acquired some old films of Johnson. Since Johnson was hot after *The Great White Hope*, Ali wanted to absorb some of that vintage energy. "Ghost in the house" became the battle cry of Ali and his handlers. But Ali knew it was Jones who had revived Johnson's ghost. The two became friendly, and when they appeared together for a promotional stunt, Ali goaded the actor into sparring with him for a photo op. Jones took a swing. Ali blocked it and accidentally broke Jones' thumb.

Jones had never been much for fighting. But what an actor he was. His portrayal of Johnson was not entirely accurate, nor was it meant to be. But in the eyes of the public – and for a generation searching for Black icons – he showed Johnson as America needed to see him: angry, proud, and capable of a belly laugh.

"... I was completely unprepared for the critical praise, the later fame, and the thunderous response of our audiences."

- JAMES EARL JONES

A FIGHTER'S DEBUT

TO REACH THE DREAM OF HIS FIRST PRO FIGHT, **JOSH POPPER** HAD TO CONQUER PERSONAL DEMONS, RIDE A SOCIAL MEDIA ROLLERCOASTER AND NAVIGATE A MAZE OF HEALTH CONCERNS

By Thomas Hauser

Gilbran Laureano Jr./Country Box

On October 1, a 31-year-old heavyweight named Josh Popper made his pro debut at The Texas Troubadour Theatre in Nashville, Tennessee, and knocked out an overmatched opponent in the first round. But the fight raises issues that go beyond the "W" and "L" on the combatants' ring records.

Popper was born and raised in New Jersey and now lives in New York. He played college football as a defensive lineman for Rowan University and was invited to minicamps for the Arizona Cardinals (in 2016) and Indianapolis Colts (2017) but in each instance was cut before the season started. He's 6-feet-3-inches tall and weighs in the neighborhood of 225 pounds. Had he played in the NFL, he would have been a linebacker. He's articulate and personable.

Josh's early years were a mix of privilege and hardship.

"My parents got an ugly divorce when I was young," he recalls, "and I went from living in a million-dollar home to being homeless."

Then the dark side got darker.

"I was sexually abused, repeatedly, when I was young," Josh remembers. "I have demons. The abuse is in the past now. It was dealt with by the legal system. Later, I confronted the abuser directly. He admitted what he'd done and apologized. I think the apology was sincere and I'm confident, given all the circumstances, that he won't do it to anyone else again. But I bottled all the pain and anger inside me and it drives me now."

Popper has worked as a model, sold insurance, and appeared on a reality-TV show (*Summer House*). He has a large equity interest in a boxing gym called Bredwinners, located at 1 East 28th Street in Manhattan, that he counterintuitively opened at the height of the pandemic.

"I'm very competitive in everything I do," he says. "I've always been that way. I've always wanted to stand out and be better, not just blend it. I'll never let someone else put their limits on me."

That led him to boxing.

"I've been through a lot in my life," Josh explains. "Boxing helps me let out the stress and deal with things that are inside me. I don't think of myself as an angry person anymore. Football helped me deal with a lot of that, although it still comes out in the ring from time to time."

Popper started boxing in 2018 at age twenty-five. That's a late start. On June 1, 2019, he attended the first fight between Anthony Joshua and Andy Ruiz at Madison Square Garden. "I never witnessed a sporting event that moved me like that," he recalls. His first amateur bout was contested on June 24, 2022.

"Boxing scares me," Josh admits. "Walking to the ring, I'm asking myself, 'What am I doing here? I'm about to get punched in the face.' I'm scared until the bell rings. But I love the nerves. They make me feel alive. Right before a fight starts, I look at my opponent. And what's going through my mind is, 'You don't know what's coming your way. You might not deserve it, but I'm coming at you.' Then the bell rings, something in my mind clicks, and I'm not nervous anymore."

Popper had nine amateur fights, compiling a 7-and-2 record with 3 knockouts. Too often, he made opponents miss but didn't make them pay. "I'm not the most aggressive fighter in the world," he concedes. "But I play defense well. I move the way I move. I defend the way I defend. I take pride in the fact that I don't take many punches. I like to lay traps. And then I transition to a mean, violent me.

"Being a professional fighter is something I want to do," Josh continues. "I'm one hundred percent boxing-oriented at this point in my life. My best weapons are my jab and my quickness. Everything works off my jab. I'm a boxer, not a mauler. I know that to succeed in the pros I'll have to become more of a fighter. But I think I can be world-class."

When Popper announced his intention to turn pro last year, there was a feeding frenzy of sorts among New York promoters for his services. Offers ran higher than one would expect for an amateur with his limited ring ledger.

Why?

There's a detail that I've left out.

Josh was living with his girlfriend who was 65 years old at the time. Her name is Madonna . . . Yes, that Madonna – the singer, songwriter, actress and trailblazing entrepreneur. They met when Josh was training her son at Bredwinners Gym. A series of photos posted on Instagram in February 2023 showed them posing together after one of his amateur fights at Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn. One month later, Madonna was photographed at another of his matches. In April, they attended a piano recital together.

"I'm scared until the bell rings. But I love the nerves. They make me feel alive."

We live in a social media world, and boxing is particularly susceptible to its influence. Too often in the sweet science today, celebrity status counts for more than talent.

Promoters were salivating.

"We'll build you for a fight against Jake Paul," one promoter told him.

"If Josh hits it big," another promoter fantasized, "he and Madonna could be boxing's version of Travis Kelce and Taylor Swift."

Josh declined to play "the Madonna card." Instead, he agreed to make his pro debut on a small club-fight show slated for December 16, 2023, at Sony Hall in New York under the promotional aegis of Larry Goldberg. The plan was to match him against Gabriel Aguilar Costa – a 22-year-old living in Massachusetts who had a 2-and-5 ring record with 5 KOs by.

"Nine amateur fights isn't a lot," Eric Bottjer (Goldberg's matchmaker) explained. "Josh is athletic and he's a quick learner. But that's different from experience. He's still a novice and he has to be matched accordingly. You want to protect the integrity of the show but you don't want to get him beat. So you don't match him against someone who's too gifted or too experienced as a fighter. Josh against Aguilar would have been a fair test and a good fight."

It wasn't to be. In mid-November, Popper suffered a scratched cornea. The fight was rescheduled for March 7. Then, in mid-February of this year, a routine MRI required for licensing by the New York State Athletic Commission revealed an irregularity that troubled the commission's medical staff. Popper submitted a report from an outside neurologist saying that his condition left him no more at risk than any other fighter. But New York and New Jersey both denied him a license to box.

That was followed by more bad news. On May 24, gossip columnists reported that Josh and Madonna had split up. Later, People magazine confirmed they had gone separate ways and that Madonna was dating Akeem Morris, a Jamaica-born soccer player.

Being Madonna's ex-boyfriend is a less marketable commodity than being Madonna's boyfriend.

Meanwhile, Popper was anxious to fight. And he had a new management team – co-managers Sonya Lamonakis and Marty Hopwood.

Lamonakis is vice president of USA Boxing Metro and had been seeking involvement in Popper's career long before he turned pro. Hopwood has had a successful career in business and

law, manages or co-manages a handful of club fighters, and seems sincere in his desire to help them. His involvement with Popper began post-Madonna.

Hopwood and Lamonakis made the decision to bring Josh to Tennessee, which doesn't require an MRI for fighters under age 35 to be licensed. His debut fight was scheduled for August 20 against Nathaniel Copeland (1-5, 1 KO, 5 KOs by). Then Popper hurt a rib sparring and his fight was rescheduled for October 1. This time, the opponent was Mike Diorio, who had won once in 14 bouts and lost every round in an outing 10 days earlier against a 1-and-1 fighter in South Carolina.

Josh's fight was "pay to play." In other words, Hopwood paid Popper's end plus Diorio's $2,500 purse and another $700 for Diorio's expenses in order to entice promoter Jimmy Adams to put Josh on the card.

If Tennessee Athletic Commission officials had gone to BoxRec.com's restricted access section and looked up Popper's record before the fight (as required by the Association of Boxing Commissions), they would have seen a red warning banner beneath Josh's name with the legend, "Flagged by the New York State Athletic Commission." That warning indicates a medical or administrative issue that requires attention. But Matt Delaglio (executive director of the New York State Athletic Commission) says that no one from the Tennessee commission contacted the NYSAC about the warning flag.

Moreover, Hopwood says that no one from the Tennessee commission asked him about the red flag or any prior MRI that Josh might have had.

The Tennessee Athletic Commission did not respond to a request from The Ring for comment on the issue. Popper's condition involved no wrongdoing on his part, and The Ring is respecting his request that the specific finding from the MRI not be revealed in these pages. It's enough to say for now that the lack of uniform health and safety standards in boxing is appalling.

A fighter's first pro fight is a bit like losing his virginity. It can be a good or bad experience. But once it's over, there's no going back.

Popper-Diorio was the semifinal bout of the evening on October 1. Some of the other fights on the card featured (records will suffice) 14-0 vs. 36-30-1 . . . 21-0 vs. 7-5-3 . . . 1-0 vs. 3-25-2 . . . 0-0 vs. 0-0.

Popper's brief relationship with iconic pop star Madonna made him a sought-after commodity among NYC boxing promoters.

One of the 0-0 fighters was 19 years old and the other was 42. The 42-year-old was knocked out in the first round.

Popper had weighed in for his bout at a sculpted 221 pounds. Diorio is listed as 5-feet-11-inches tall, has fought at weights as low as 168 and as high as 255, and weighed in at 233 pounds with flab hanging down.

Josh was poised during the fight, and Diorio did nothing to take him out of his comfort zone. Viewing the video, it's unclear whether Diorio even landed a punch. Popper turned southpaw and knocked his opponent down with a left hand at 1:51 of round one. Diorio rose after 13 seconds and the referee (shades of Tunney-Dempsey II) evaluated his condition with an eye toward letting the fight continue. But Diorio was wobbling and bent over (he said later that he hurt his back when he hit the canvas). The time of the stoppage was 2:14 of the first round.

Popper wants to continue fighting, not just for the sake of fighting but also as part of a business plan to open a second gym and build his name as a brand.

"Getting back in the ring again was a high," he said afterward. "It was a quick fight, so I didn't get to settle in and open up my bag of tricks. But I'm satisfied with the way I performed. I've only had one fight, so I can't be calling people out. But I want to get to a high level and fight the top guys."

Hopwood believes that New York was overly cautious in denying Josh a license to box and that New Jersey simply followed suit. He says that he plans to submit evidence that Popper is fit to fight to the Nevada State Athletic Commission, hoping that Josh will be licensed there, and will then revisit the issue of licensure with New Jersey and New York.

Meanwhile, Popper is working to be the best fighter that he can be. He's doing what he wants to do. And he can say, "I'm a professional boxer." RING

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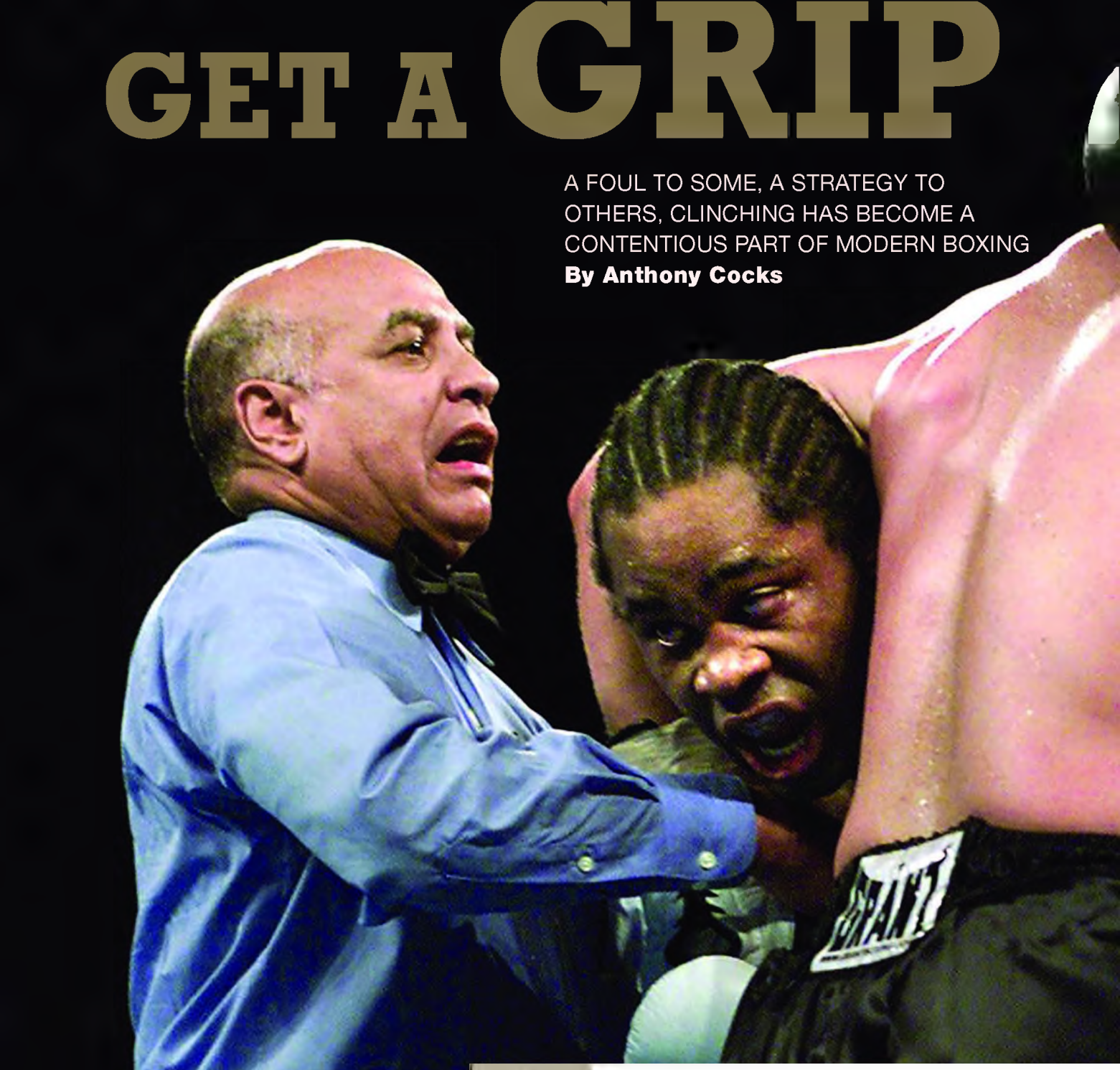
GET A GRIP

A FOUL TO SOME, A STRATEGY TO OTHERS, CLINCHING HAS BECOME A CONTENTIOUS PART OF MODERN BOXING

By Anthony Cocks

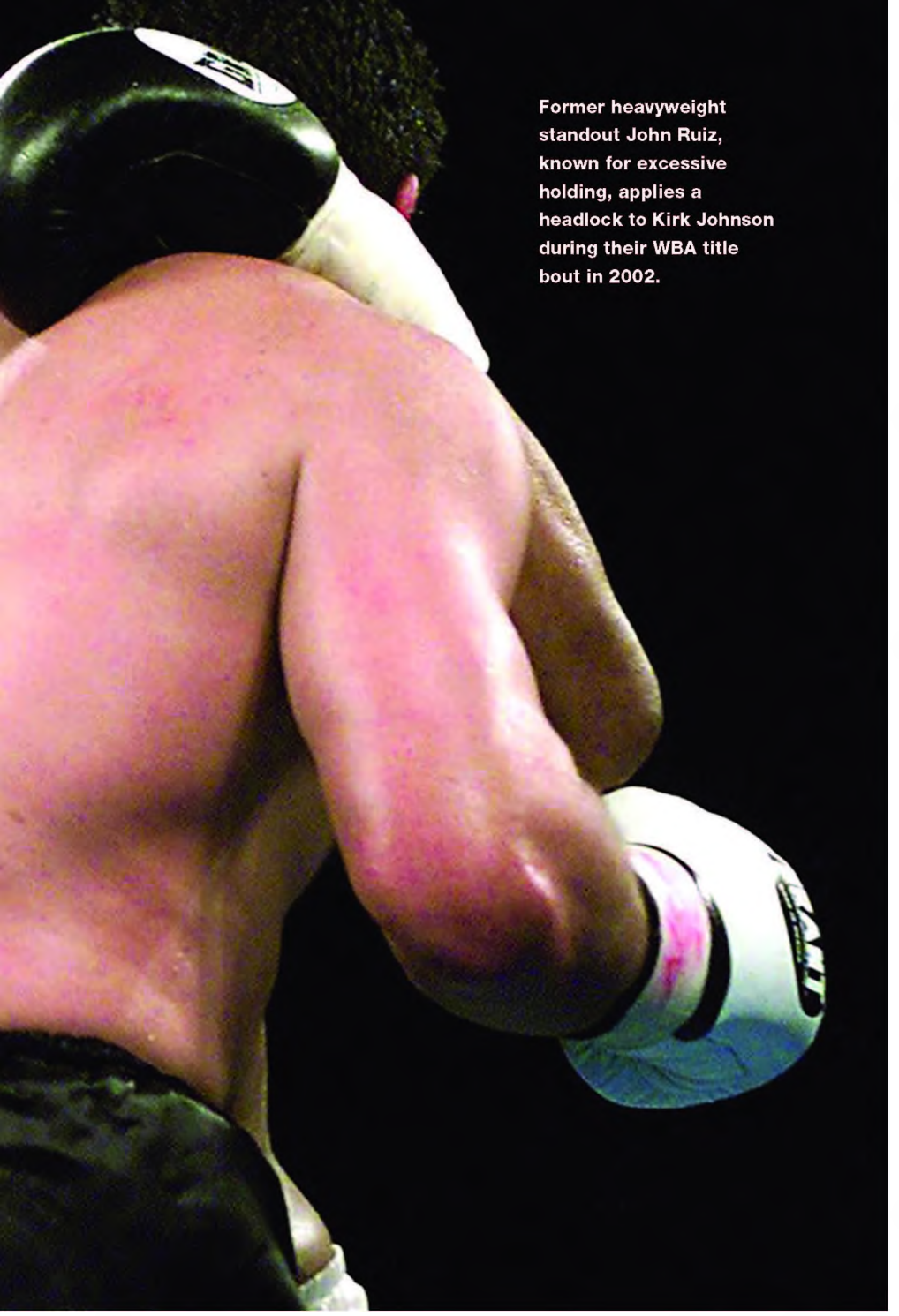


A strange thing happened in the ninth round of the 12-round junior middleweight bout between Vergil Ortiz Jr. and Serhii Bohachuk back in August.

For the briefest of moments, they clinched.

Across the previous eight rounds, Ortiz and Bohachuk had fought at a frenetic pace. The action was as intense as it was explosive. Much of the fight took place at close quarters as the duo traded chopping shots to the head and powerful rips to the body.

It was a battle of wills to see who would



Former heavyweight standout John Ruiz, known for excessive holding, applies a headlock to Kirk Johnson during their WBA title bout in 2002.

JOHN GURZINSKI

break first.

Ortiz suffered two flash knockdowns but ultimately prevailed by majority decision to keep his undefeated record intact. It was the first time he had been extended the distance in 22 outings.

The crowd in Las Vegas lapped it up. It's not often boxing fans get to witness an instant classic.

The lack of holding on the inside is what made the fight so special. Neither man sought to tie up when the going got tough, instead opting to fight their way out of trouble. Credit must also be given to referee Harvey Dock who, at the merest sniff of a clinch, broke the fighters up.

It was refreshing to watch.

Unfortunately for boxing fans, fights like this are the exception to the rule. Far too often, boxers are permitted to wrap up their opponents in a passive clinch as soon as the going gets tough. Back in the 2000s, two-time heavyweight titleholder and perennial contender John Ruiz earned the sobriquet "Huggy Bear" on boxing message boards due to his patented one-two-clinch combinations before mauling on the inside. Floyd Mayweather Jr. became adept at utilizing the clinch to nullify the action in fights as his career progressed, and as his star continued to rise, it was a tactic that he was increasingly allowed to get away with. In Mayweather's rematch with Jose Luis Castillo in December 2002, eight months after his highly controversial points win over the teak-tough Mexican, referee Joe Cortez would frequently separate the boxers from the clinch while Castillo was still punching on the inside and Mayweather was simply holding on, effectively penalizing the boxer who was trying to make the fight.

Five years later against Ricky Hatton, Mayweather had honed it into an art. With Cortez operating again as the third man in the ring, he was even more harsh on Hatton than he had been on Castillo. Any chance that Hatton had of victory, as slim as it may have been, evaporated as soon as the American referee was given the assignment.

We have seen it time and time again in the modern era. Get hurt, grab your opponent. Lean on him and soak up the clock. Clear your head. Wait for the referee to call break, then reset. Rinse and repeat.

But it wasn't always this way. There was a time when boxers were taught to box their way out of trouble. These days, they are taught to clinch.

So how did we get here?

"It's crept into the sport over a period of time," said veteran Australian referee Brad Vocale, who once disqualified Argentine Jose Alberto Clavero in his fight against Paul Briggs for failing to engage. "Trainers weigh up their fighter's ability, where they're maybe not that fit or maybe not that skilled, and they use grappling or holding, if you want to call it that, as a means of defense. The boxer might be doing it a little bit hard, so they'll just grab ahold of their

Serhii Bohachuk (left) and Vergil Ortiz Jr. were too busy fighting to make use of clinches during their barnburner.

Cris Esqueda/Golden Boy

opponent. Left-right, bang, grab ahold of him. Force the referee to break and just keep doing that.

"Holding is actually a foul. A lot of people don't realize that. Other fouls, like hitting on the back of the head, punching to the groin, is a foul. Holding is also a foul, a deliberate foul. It's not policed enough by referees. It needs to be. Realistically, it takes away from the action. It can make a good fight bad and an average fight horrible."

Vocale has a point. Think back to your favorite fights from any era. Go back and count the clinches. The smart money says they will be few and far between.

In the Ortiz-Bohachuk fight, the action oscillated between long-range and close quarters, with the more compelling exchanges taking place on the inside. As early as the back half of the opening round, the two combatants stood in a phone booth and traded, displaying the sort of quality infighting skills that are a scarce commodity these days.

The eighth round of the bout was telling. Early in the stanza, Bohachuk clipped Ortiz with a left hook that toppled him forward, his gloves touching the canvas. Although he wasn't hurt, Ortiz could've been forgiven for conceding the round, boxing and clinching his way out of trouble. After all, it's become such a common tactic that fight fans and broadcasters alike have been known to condemn a boxer for failing to take the safety-first approach.

But Ortiz didn't do that. He chose to trade with Bohachuk, pouring on the pressure and hurting him late, even though the round was ultimately scored 10-8 against him by all three of the official judges. He chanced his hand and it made for an exciting contest.

The pace of the fight ultimately took its toll. In the final round, Ortiz and Bohachuk got tangled up in an accidental clinch. Referee Dock was quick to separate them. With a minute left in the bout, the two fighters tied up again, this time in earnest. Dock barely gave them a second for a breather, breaking them again. With 20 seconds left on the clock and both boxers clearly fatigued, Ortiz wrapped Bohachuk up and pushed him back to the ropes. Again, Dock was quick to intervene.

This bout was a firefight from start to finish. CompuBox reported that the combatants threw a combined total of 1,579 punches. Bohachuk threw 85 more punches, but Ortiz outlanded him by 40 blows.

There are a couple of reasons the contest will live on long in the memories of fight fans. One, the willingness of the boxers to actually fight; and two, the strict adherence to the rules of Harvey Dock.

"It's difficult as a referee," said Corey Erdman, who provided an excellent call of the action on DAZN alongside former middleweight contender Gabriel Rosado.

"Say you have this unwritten rule where you give them three seconds to work their way out of a clinch and if

not, the ref will break it up. You could see fighters who aren't interested in fighting on the inside, who are just looking to utilize or weaponize clinches, taking that to the absolute extreme every time. In pro wrestling where you have, like, five seconds to break a hold, there would 100 percent be fighters and trainers who would look to gain by that. It's really difficult to allow for any kind of clinching if you want to totally avoid people using it in a nefarious way. That's not compelling television, right?"

In a broad sense, great fights have little to no clinching. But under that umbrella term sits passive clinches, when a boxer ties up his opponent to soak up time to recover, and active clinches, when the fighters are grappling on the inside for position with the intent of creating angles for their offensive arsenal. Defining a legal clinch as opposed to an illegal clinch is the issue.

"You and I both agree that if you have your hands free and if you're working out of the clinch, that's fine," said Erdman. "And that creates good action. Guys working out of the clinch, that's in effect inside fighting. The problem becomes if you look to fully eradicate inside fighting, it could then make boxing look very technical.

"Take European amateur boxing, where the moment you touch on the inside, there's a break. And then there's a lot of referee interference, which can really screw with the tempo of a fight. Those are the thoughts in my mind when it comes to that, too. In a perfect world, to instantaneously identify what is an illegal maneuver on the inside was a clinch and just taking those out, yes, that would automatically make every fight a little bit more exciting. But in execution, it becomes a little bit trickier."

The solution, according to Vocale, lies with the referees.

"We get into the ring, we've got our bowtie nice and square, we've got our nice blue shirt neatly pressed, and a lot of guys are just interested in how they look," he said. "As the referee, they're the star of the show and they don't actually get into the nitty-gritty. You really need to get into the trenches with the fighters. They don't.

"If you really get into the zone with the fighters, you need to take the rules and regulations with you rather than leaving them at home. You have to be prepared to impose those rules, and that's when you'll become a better referee and you won't allow these things.

"It can make a good fight bad and an average fight horrible."

"I'm not putting myself up as Mr. Perfect. I'm far from it. I inadvertently let things happen; I let things slide too. But I'm very much more aware now of these sorts of little things now, and I've done some fights where one guy is just holding and the biggest part of his repertoire is doing just that.

"When we look at that, we've got to say 'OK, we really need to start penalizing fighters and let them know.' There's no point saying, 'I'll take a point off you.' How many times do you hear a boxing referee say, 'Hey, mate, don't do that. I'm going to take a point off you,' and they never do? That's the problem.

"You don't get any points for holding. That's not the name of our sport. You're only going to waste energy if you're only going to try to hold on to your opponent. It shows to me that they are trying to nullify their opponent's attack not with counterpunching – not with parrying, not with ducking and weaving and slipping punches – but by holding.

"So basically if they win, they're beating a legitimate fighter with a foul."

Not everyone agrees. Former titleholder turned pundit Sergio Mora believes it is a perfectly permissible tactic. Speaking to Chris Mannix on the Boxing with Mannix and Mora podcast after Artur Beterbiev outpointed Dmitry Bivol to claim the undisputed light heavyweight championship back in October, Mora said Bivol's lack of clinching cost him the fight.

"Bivol should have made him miss and back up the monster with the older legs. He had surgery, Beterbiev. You got to force that knee backwards," said Mora. "Monsters don't like backing up. When you clinch them and back them up, they don't like that."

This month, we will see Tyson Fury attempt to regain the Ring Magazine heavyweight crown against Oleksandr Usyk in their highly anticipated rematch in Saudi Arabia. Leading into their first fight in May, conventional wisdom suggested that Fury would succeed if he used his substantial bulk to bully ex-cruiserweight king Usyk around the ring and lean on him in close.

But Usyk never allowed it.

The clever Ukrainian southpaw used his nimble footwork to dart in and out of range, boxing small while Fury boxed tall. Usyk, who gave away six inches in height and almost 40 pounds in weight, was able to turn Fury regularly when the big Brit attempted to tie him up. When Fury did manage to clinch, Usyk proved to be surprisingly strong on the inside, refusing to wilt under his weight. And in something of a genius move, Usyk simply held him back in a passive clinch, forcing referee Mark Nelson to move in quickly to call a break.

Usyk ultimately prevailed on the cards via split decision after hurting Fury in the ninth frame and then deftly avoiding the Gypsy King's attempts to clinch, stepping around him to fire off hard shots that left his opponent draped on the ropes.

But the question remains: What exactly is a fair clinch, and when is a boxer trying to game the system?

That, gentle reader, is up to you to decide.

WORLD BEAT

AUSTRALIA

BY ANTHONY COCKS

Ring Magazine and IBF cruiserweight champion **Jai Opetaia** plans to become a three-division titleholder after he unifies all four major 200-pound belts.

The 29-year-old Australian southpaw has long coveted a shot at Chris Billam-Smith, but after a year of call-outs and offers of cash bonuses, Opetaia was unable to coax the Englishman to the negotiating table.

Opetaia believes it is his destiny to become undisputed, but the real question here is how long he will choose to stay at cruiserweight if unification bouts don't materialize.

"I want to be the undisputed cruiserweight champion," said Opetaia (26-0, 20 KOs) on DAZN's mini-documentary Boxing's My Life ahead of his six-round beatdown of Jack Massey in October. "Then we move up. We can go to bridgerweight (a division only recognized by the WBC and WBA, with a weight limit of 224 pounds) and win a world title there. Go to heavyweight and win a world title there. I honestly believe I can do these things.

"We've just got to take one fight at a time. Focus, train hard, stay busy. We can't get comfortable. I believe the rest will just fall into place."

It looks like unification bouts will elude Opetaia for a while yet. The IBF granted him an exemption to face England's Massey on the proviso that he take on the New Jersey-based sanctioning body's little-known mandatory contender, Huseyin Cinkara (22-0, 18 KOs), a 39-year-old Germany-born Turk, no later than January 20 next year.

★ ★ ★

Demsey McKean to fight Moses Itauma on Usyk-Fury II undercard

Once-beaten heavyweight Demsey McKean will square up against rising prospect Moses Itauma on the undercard of the Ring Magazine heavyweight championship rematch between Oleksandr Usyk and Tyson Fury at Kingdom Arena in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, on December 21.

The tall and rangy McKean (22-1, 14 KOs), a southpaw, will be hoping to get back in the winner's circle following his 12th-round stoppage loss to Filip Hrgovic in August last year. For Itauma (10-0, 8 KOs), also a lefty, he will be looking to show that his natural talent will ascend with him as he faces increasingly tougher opposition.

If McKean is triumphant, he would be a welcome addition to a theoretical but as-yet unscheduled Matchroom Boxing homecoming card headlined by IBF junior welterweight titleholder Liam Paro that would also likely feature WBC women's featherweight beltholder Skye Nicolson.

Brisbane or the Gold Coast would be frontrunners to host the event, with all three southpaws hailing from the Sunshine State of Queensland. In the meantime, Paro is scheduled to face Richardson Hitchins on December 7 in Puerto Rico.

★ ★ ★

Tim Tszyu relocates to Las Vegas looking to put horror year behind him

Former WBO junior middleweight beltholder Tim Tszyu will be forced to rebuild in 2025 after what can only be described as a disappointing year.

The 30-year-old from the Sydney suburb of Rockdale won over many fans with his gutsy effort against Sebastian Fundora in March, battling his way to a split decision loss in his Las Vegas debut despite suffering a nasty scalp gash that bled profusely throughout the bout.

In his challenge to IBF 154-pound titleholder Bakhram Murtazaliev (23-0, 17 KOs) in October, he fared even worse. The 31-year-old Russian powerhouse belted Tszyu around the ring, dropping him three times in the second round and once more in

the third before the towel came in from the challenger's corner.

After the fight, Tszyu (24-2, 17 KOs) took the loss on the chin, praising Murtazaliev in the ring at the Caribe Royale in Orlando, Florida.

Now based out of Vegas, Tszyu will have a lot of work to do to climb to the top of the mountain again.

Australian-based boxing journalist Anthony Cocks has been covering the sport for over 20 years for various print and online publications.

★ ★ ★

JAPAN

BY YURIKO MIYATA

Iwao Hakamada's 58-year battle finally ended with victory and the former pro boxer's long-sought freedom. The Shizuoka District Court found Hakamada not guilty of murder on September 26, denying the prosecution's demand for the death penalty in the retrial of an infamous 1960s case.

Richard Pelham; (Right) STR

Hakamada, a rugged journeyman who fought at bantamweight and featherweight from 1959-1961, was wrongly accused of robbery, murder and arson that occurred in Shimizu City of the Shizuoka Prefecture in June 1966, just two weeks after the gun-murder incident in New Jersey that sent an innocent Rubin "Hurricane" Carter to prison.

The Shizuoka District Public Prosecutors Office decided not to appeal the case on October 9, finalizing Hakamada's freedom. The court also accused the investigating authorities of three evidence fabrications to have Hakamada convicted.

The 88-year-old Hakamada, his 91-year-old sister, Hideko, and their supporters – which includes a boxing society that has campaigned to clear his name for decades – were overjoyed for the justice.

Ex-pro boxer and boxing photographer Hiroaki Yamaguchi, who used to wear a T-shirt with the slogan "Free Hakamada Now!" whenever shooting at ringside, posted a smiling selfie stating "No longer need to wear those shirts!"

It's well known in Japan that the late Carter, a former middleweight contender who spent 19 years of a life sentence in prison on a false charge, had recognized and supported Hakamada.

★ ★ ★

The infamous "Hakamada Case" occurred at the miso manufacturing and sales company where the former nationally rated featherweight, 30 years old at the time, was working as a live-in employee. His boss and three other family members were killed, and the building was set on fire afterward. Hakamada, who helped to extinguish the fire, was arrested and imprisoned in August on suspicion mainly based on the assumption that he was strong enough to kill the boss, who had an intimidating physique and judo experience. Hakamada was forced to admit guilt under severe torture but was persistent in his innocence in court. However, the Shizuoka Prefectural Police submitted sudden "new evidence" – five bloodstained articles of Hakamada's clothing, found thrown in a miso tank – that eventually led the Supreme Court to issue a death sentence, which was finalized on December 12, 1980.

Opening retrials and overturning previous court decisions are difficult procedures that take many years – especially in Japan – so it was truly noble of Hakamada's defense and supporters to take such a tremendous amount of time to prove his innocence.

The members of the Japan Pro Boxing Association (a union of club owners) established the campaign "Save the Innocent Boxer Hakamada" in 1980 and continued steadily even when the petition was stagnant. They handed out leaflets to fans at the famous fighting venue Korakuen Hall to keep people aware of this tragedy involving an ex-boxer. Some of the supporters have passed away on the long way, hoping for this triumph. Hakamada was able to add his own words in person at a supporters rally on September 29: "It's been a long battle, but I've finally been found completely innocent."

The "Hakamada Seats" for Iwao and Hideko Hakamada placed at ringside in Korakuen Hall since March 2013 are always there for the true warriors who have persevered through the toughest fights.

★ ★ ★

Eight World Title Bouts In Three Days

Eight matches for world titles took place in the span of three days – October 12, 13 and 14, the long weekend of national Sports Day – shaking up the 108-, 112- and 118-pound divisions.

Two new world titleholders were crowned at junior flyweight: Masamichi Yabuki, who lifted the IBF belt with a ninth-round stoppage of South African veteran Sivenathi Nontshinga at the Aichi Prefectural International Exhibition Hall on October 12, and Shokichi Iwata, who won the vacant WBO strap with a third-round TKO of Spain's Jairo Noriega at Ariake Arena on October 13.

Yabuki (17-4, 16 KOs), who grabbed a world title two years and seven months (a span that includes a setback due to a torn left Achilles tendon) after losing the WBC strap in his rematch with Kenshiro Teraji, said he was inspired by his boxing children – 14-year-old daughter Yuzuki and 9-year-old son Katsuba, who competed in the junior national tournament 10 days before his fight with Nontshinga.

Iwata (14-1, 11 KOs), the first professional boxing world titleholder to

have graduated from Waseda University, one of the nation's most prestigious colleges, immediately called out Yabuki for a 108-pound unification fight.

"I believe that's a matchup that fans want," said Iwata. "I'll work hard to stay at this weight if the fight comes true, although it's really hard for me to maintain the same weight I've fought at since my high school days."

At flyweight, Seigo Yuri Akui defended his WBA belt with a split decision over Thai challenger Thananchai Charunphak on the same undercard that featured Iwata-Noriega, while Anthony Olascuaga retained his WBO title at the same venue on October 14 following a disappointing no-decision against Jonathan "Bomba" Gonzalez, who complained of impaired vision from a cut caused by an accidental headbutt in the opening round. That result was later changed to a TKO 1 win for Olascuaga, as it was noted that the ringside physician had ruled Gonzalez could continue but Gonzalez indicated he didn't want to fight on.

And former Ring Magazine/WBA/WBC junior flyweight champion Kenshiro Teraji tossed his hat into the flyweight mix by winning the vacant WBC title with an 11th-round stoppage of Nicaraguan veteran Cristofer Rosales (who suffered a broken nose) on the October 13 card.

"This is the first step to participate in a unification league," said Teraji, who has set the goal of going undisputed at flyweight, a dream that fell short during his tenure at 108 pounds.

Olascuaga is more than willing to put his belt on the line vs. Teraji, who stopped him in an April 2023 junior flyweight title bout when the L.A. native only had five pro bouts under his belt (as a late sub for Bomba Gonzalez).

"It's not personal, but the loss to Kenshiro was the only stain on my record. So I want to say that I am very open to a rematch, maybe somewhere along the line of next year," Olascuaga said. "To unify our titles will be a great match."

The 112-pound weight class is so attractive now that even Yabuki has made it public that he wants to move up and challenge Olascuaga. Former Ring Magazine 108-pound champ Hiroto Kyoguchi, who got back on track by outpointing Filipino Vince Paras in their rubber match in Yokohama on October 13, also adds to the flyweight division, which will be busier and hotter than ever in 2025.

On the same October 14 card that featured Olascuaga, Japan lost its only titleholder in the deep junior bantamweight division when Kosei Tanaka lost his WBO belt to unheralded South African Phumelele Cafu (11-0-3, 8 KOs), who scored the fierce bout's only knockdown en route to a razor-thin split decision.

Tanaka (20-2, 11 KOs) remains a player at 115 pounds along with fellow four-division titleholder Kazuto Ioka, but bantamweight is Japan's glamor division, with all four sanctioning body titles held by Japanese fighters.

With two of those bantamweight bosses – Yoshiki Takei (WBO) and Ryosuke Nishida (IBF) – ringside at Ariake Arena, popular former kickboxer **Tenshin Nasukawa** won his first pro boxing belt (the vacant WBO Asian Pacific title) with a 10-round unanimous decision over undefeated Filipino Gerwin Asilo.

Nasukawa wasted no time in calling attention to Takei, also a former kickboxing champ. "I won today, Takei," he said from the ring, adding, "I will definitely be fighting for the world title within the next year."

But the class of the 118-pound division is Junto Nakatani, the three-weight titleholder who scored his third consecutive stoppage by toppling Thailander Tasana Salapat (who had never been knocked down, let alone stopped) in six rounds.

Nakatani (29-0, 22 KOs) defended his WBC title and No. 9 position in The Ring's pound-for-pound rankings.

"I'm happy that I was able to be the first one to drop him to the floor," Nakatani said of Salapat (76-2, 53 KOs). "I studied him carefully to find the timing to land the punch to get the win.

"Next, I want a unification fight with any champion in [the 118-pound weight] class."

A dream fight with Naoya Inoue is in the not-far future. In the meantime, one of Nakatani's previous bantamweight targets, The Monster's younger brother, lost his WBA title. While Nakatani's superb composure and skills were priceless for boxing fans to witness, the most impressive performance during the busy three days belonged to Seiya Tsutsumi, who beat Takuma Inoue by unanimous decision.

Physical strength, mental toughness and stamina honed by numerous battles against solid domestic competition combined to push the switch-hitting former national champ past the more polished boxing skills of Inoue, who defeated Tsutsumi in the semifinal of a national high school tournament 12 years ago.

Tsutsumi (12-0-2, 8 KOs) ignored Takuma's counterpunches from varied angles and kept connecting with combinations that eventually helped him tally 1,068 thrown punches, according to CompuBox, more than doubling Takuma's total. Tsutsumi scored an eight count with the ropes needed to hold Takuma up in the 10th round.

When Tsutsumi heard Jimmy Lennon Jr.'s "And the new!" he grabbed the WBA belt and lifted it up, crying "Anaguchi!" – the surname of Kazuki Anaguchi, who passed away following a brutal 10-round Japanese title bout with Tsutsumi in December.

"His determination was superior to mine," said Inoue (20-2, 5 KOs), who was attempting his third title defense. "He was well prepared technically, too.

No need to listen to the decision; I knew I had lost."

Tsutsumi was humble in victory.

"I am totally satisfied right now, so I'm not thinking about unification bouts, but I may deserve mention since I just beat Takuma Inoue, a big name in this division. Of course, the WBC bantamweight belt is attractive, but winning it would be the hardest job in this division. I would say I almost have no chance to win right now."

Tsutsumi has had many rounds of sparring with Nakatani already. After some sessions with the tall southpaw at Manny Robles' gym in South Gate, California, this past May, he was honest in his assessment: "I am shocked to know that I still have this much of a gap to cover in order to reach his level."

Despite his modesty, a Nakatani showdown won't be a mismatch if it's made. We've seen that Tsutsumi's energy and passion can lead to unpredictable results. With this brave newcomer, bantamweight remains Japan's premier weight class and is ready to roll next year.

SOUTH AFRICA

BY DROEKS MALAN

South African boxing went through a deep valley but also scaled a high mountain in a span of three days in Japan, October 12-14.

Things didn't go well for IBF junior flyweight titleholder Sivenathi Nontshinga, who faced the hard-hitting Masamichi Yabuki in Tokoname.

After a tentative first round, Yabuki dictated the pace behind his jab, backing the champion to the ropes, working the body when he could. In the fifth round, Nontshinga found success when he targeted the body.

Things heated up in the seventh. Yabuki ripped a left uppercut to the body while Nontshinga let his hands go on the inside. Yabuki was the stronger of the two, but Nontshinga was busier.

It all went wrong for the South African in the eighth. Yabuki smashed a straight right flush to the jaw that sent Nontshinga staggering to the ropes. A follow-up barrage turned him sideways and to the canvas. After taking an eight count, the bell came to his rescue.

Nontshinga took the fight to Yabuki in the ninth. The risk didn't pay off. An uppercut-hook-right combination hurt the champion badly, and Yabuki just kept punching until Nontshinga crashed to the floor. Nontshinga dragged himself up again, but the writing was on the wall. The Japanese whirlwind was on him immediately, and a left hook followed by two rights sent his foe face-first to the canvas. The fight was waved over without a count at the 1:50 mark.

Like Nontshinga, Yabuki is now a two-time world titleholder and deserves credit for a measured performance. It was a heartbreaking setback, but Nontshinga, who suffered his second loss, has accomplished a lot in a 15-fight career and he is still only 25. He'll be back.

★ ★ ★

Then it was up to **Phumelele Cafu**, who entered the ring as a big underdog in Tokyo against WBO junior bantamweight titleholder Kosei Tanaka. Although undefeated, Cafu had never fought abroad, nor had he faced anyone remotely as accomplished as the four-weight beltholder.

He was about to tear up the script.

In what began as a battle of jabs, Cafu decided to stand his ground and had success with his left hook in the center of the ring. Tanaka would not be denied, though, and the tenor of the bout switched to a firefight.

Cafu worked his jab and scored with a hook-right combination when Tanaka got close. The champion chopped away with hooks to the body.

The fourth featured more exchanges. Tanaka had heavier hands and was the stronger of the two, but Cafu had the edge in hand speed and better defense.

The challenger had his best moment in the fifth when he timed a charging Tanaka perfectly with a short right, dropping him face-first to the canvas. Tanaka was buzzed after getting up, but Cafu didn't go for broke in the follow-up.

By the seventh, Tanaka was out of the fog. He bit down and let his hands go. The tactic worked. Under a barrage of hooks and uppercuts to the body, Cafu went into a defensive shell and seemed on the verge of being overwhelmed.

After receiving a hard talking-to from manager-trainer Colin Nathan, who performs the same role for Sivenathi Nontshinga, Cafu came out in the eighth and staged a rally of his own.

That was the pattern for the rest of the fight – blistering exchanges. Tanaka attacked the body, Cafu with whipped shots through the champion's guard.

Both let it all hang out in the championship rounds. Tanaka's heavier hands gave him an edge in the 11th, but Cafu dominated the first two minutes of the last round by punching nonstop. Tanaka went for the knockout in the final seconds, winging hard shots with murderous intentions as the bell ended a terrific contest that didn't deserve a loser.

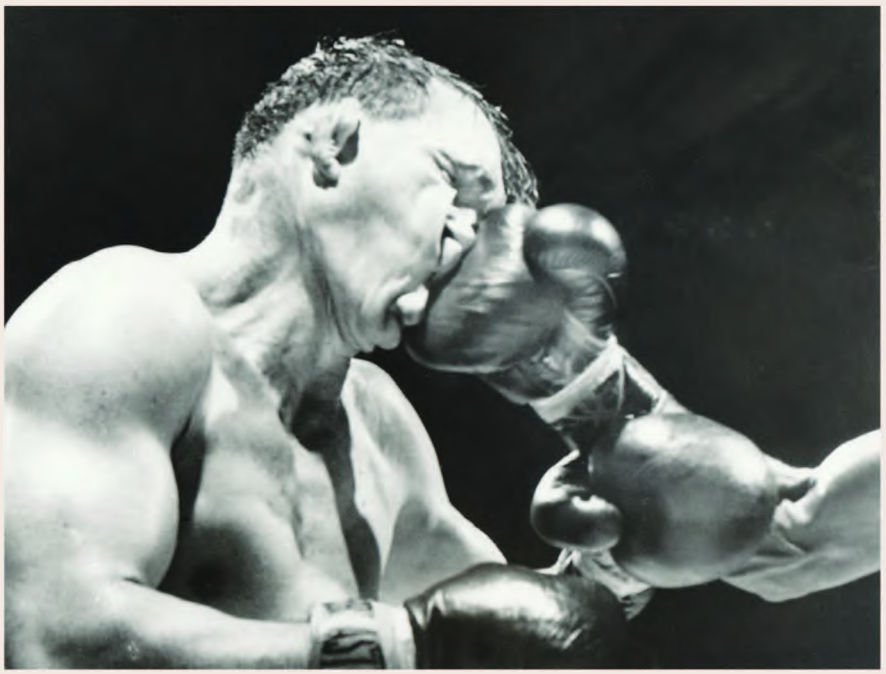
Cafu (11-0-3, 8 KOs) got the nod on two identical scorecards of 114-113; the third had it for Tanaka by the same score. It was an emotional victory for the South African in a very tough fight worthy of a rematch. After a long rest, of course.

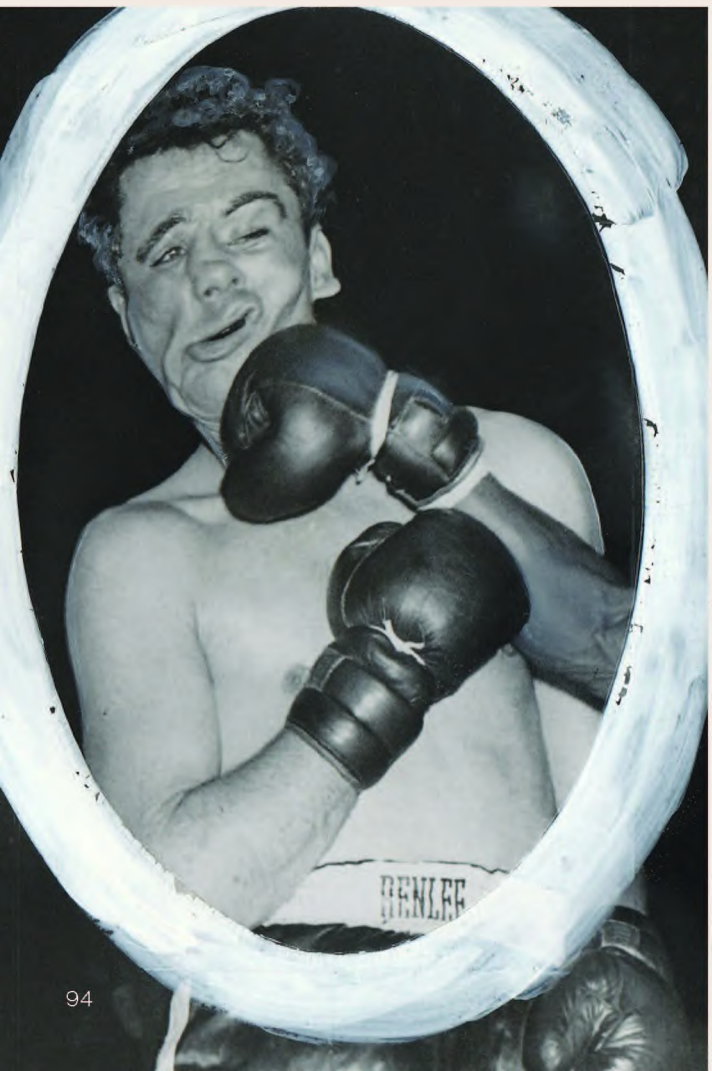
Droeks Malan is the South African correspondent for The Ring. You can follow him on Youtube at "Droeks on Boxing," reach out to him on X @droeksonboxing or email droeks@gmail.com.

Naoki Fukuda

Like The Label Says

In The Ring's deep photo archive, the vast majority of folders bear a single fighter's name. For the boxers represented only by a picture or two, there are several "miscellaneous" folders assigned to each letter of the alphabet. And then there are the ones where anything goes. On a recent trip to the archive, the editors discovered a folder simply labeled "PUNCHES." Here's a sample of what it contained. Do you recognize anybody, either on the giving or receiving end? Turn to the next page for descriptions of each photo. »

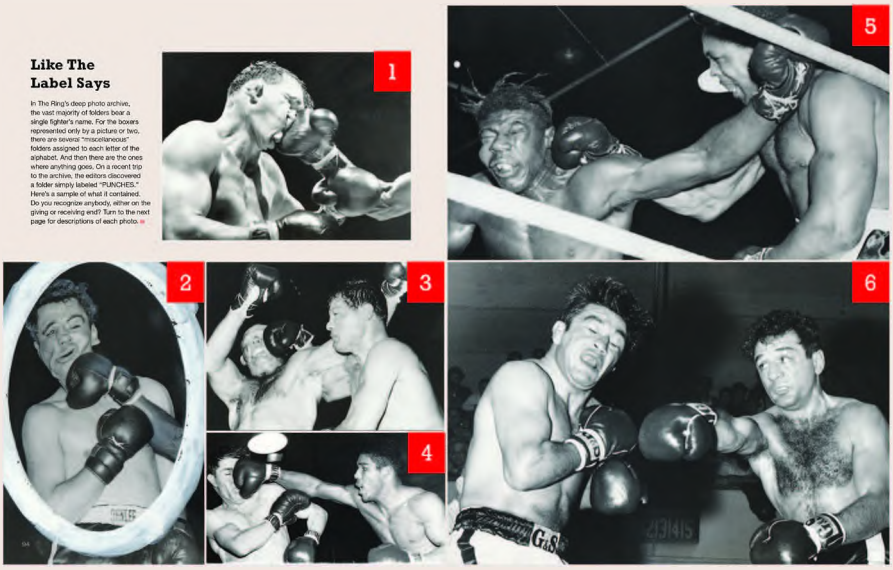




G&S

Like The Label Says

In The Ring's deep photo archive, the vast majority of folders bear a single fighter's name. For the boxers represented only by a picture or two, there are several "miscellaneous" folders assigned to each letter of the alphabet. And then there are the ones where anything goes. On a recent trip to the archive, the editors discovered a folder simply labeled "PUNCHES." Here's a sample of what it contained. Do you recognize anybody, either on the giving or receiving end? Turn to the next page for descriptions of each photo.



1 GENE FULLMER PUNCHED BY NEAL RIVERS

Gene Fullmer (left) took a lot of punishment during his 10-round battle with hard-punching contender Neal Rivers, but the former middleweight champ earned a majority decision on the strength of his trademark pressure and volume punching.

"This was tougher than fighting for the championship," Fullmer said after getting his hand raised inside Madison Square Garden on November 15, 1957. "The pressure was just as great but not the reward. I had everything to lose and Rivers had everything to gain." Fullmer hoped the victory would secure a shot at the winner of the Carmen Basilio-Sugar Ray Robinson middleweight championship rematch in 1958, but he wouldn't face Basilio until 1959 (with the NBA title on the line) or get Robinson back into the ring (for their rubber match) until 1960.

2 BLACKIE VANDERVEER PUNCHED BY PAPA BROWN

Blackie Vanderveer absorbs a jolting right from Little Papa Brown en route to a four-round draw against his fellow Seattle journeyman at the Civic Ice Arena in their hometown on July 27, 1951. It was their third bout of 1951 and one of 17 bouts that Vanderveer, the more accomplished of the two, fought that year. Brown, who'd made his pro debut just four months earlier, fought 11 times in 1951.

You don't see activity like that anymore. You also don't see fighting monikers like "Blackie" and "Little Papa" anymore. Some of their contemporaries included Spider McCallum, Bunty Andrews, Bucky Edwards and Pinky Cowan (who they fought a combined seven times).

3 PETE RADEMACHER VS. BUDDY TURMAN

Pete Rademacher (left) took his share of punishment during his fight with Buddy Turman but was able to gut out a ninth-round stoppage against the tough Texas journeyman on November 30, 1961, in Dallas. The victory (one of seven bouts Rademacher had in 1961) snapped a three-bout losing streak – stoppages to Doug Jones, George Logan and Archie Moore – for the 1956 Olympic gold medalist, who famously challenged Floyd Patterson for the heavyweight championship in his pro debut.

4 JERRY LUEDEE VS. RORY CALHOUN

Rory Calhoun (right) fought the 10-round distance for the first time in his promising career when he met Jerry Luedee at St. Nicholas Arena in New York City on January 23, 1956. Calhoun, an unbeaten middleweight prospect at the time, had outpointed Luedee in a four-rounder in November 1954, handing the Connecticut standout his first loss. Luedee bounced back with nine consecutive victories, but Calhoun, who developed into a top contender for the remainder of the decade, still had his number. Calhoun counted middleweight standouts such as Spider Webb, Joey Giambra, Ralph "Tiger" Jones and future hall of famers Joey Giardello and Dick Tiger as multi-fight rivals.

5 ARCHIE MOORE VS. JIMMY SLADE

Jimmy Slade (left) could not shock or befuddle the great Archie Moore with his sneaky power punching and herky-jerky style, as he did with many of the top light heavyweights and heavyweights of the 1950s. Instead, The Old Mongoose took the fight to the celebrated spoiler and landed thudding right crosses like the one pictured during their 10-round contest at the St. Louis Arena in St. Louis, Missouri, on February 27, 1952. Moore won a lopsided decision. Ten months and three bouts later – at the ripe ole age of 39 – he lifted the light heavyweight title from Joey Maxim at the same venue.

6 MIGUEL AGUERO VS. VINCE MARTINEZ

Miguel Aguero eats a straight right from Vince Martinez during their hotly contested 10-round bout at St. Nicholas Arena in New York City on May 8, 1961. Martinez, a former welterweight contender from New Jersey, earned a split decision. Most of the fans and ringside newspaper writers thought Aguero, a charismatic slugger from Argentina, deserved the nod.

It was the final bout of Martinez's 77-pro bout career, which had its share of notable victories, including a pair of 10-round decisions over aging all-time great Kid Gavilan in 1957. It was Aguero's only U.S. appearance in 79 pro bouts.

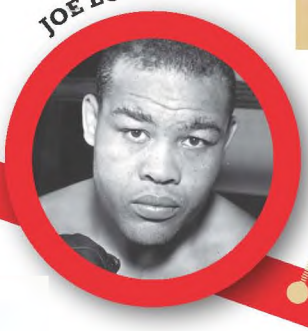
FIGHTLINE

JACK DEMPSEY

DEMPSEY KO 7 SHARKEY
July 21, 1927

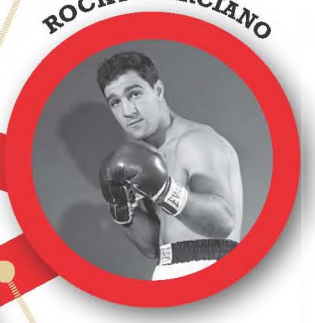
JACK SHARKEY

LOUIS KO 3 SHARKEY
Aug. 18, 1936



JOE LOUIS

MARCIANO TKO 8 LOUIS
Oct. 26, 1951



ROCKY MARCIANO

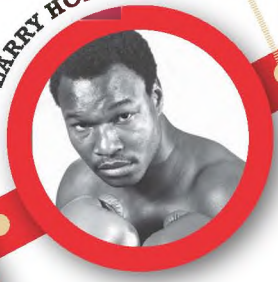
MARCIANO KO 9 MOORE
Sept. 21, 1955

ARCHIE MOORE

ALI TKO 4 MOORE
Nov. 15, 1962

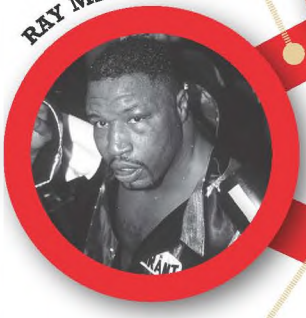
MUHAMMAD ALI

HOLMES RTD 10 ALI
Oct. 2, 1980



LARRY HOLMES

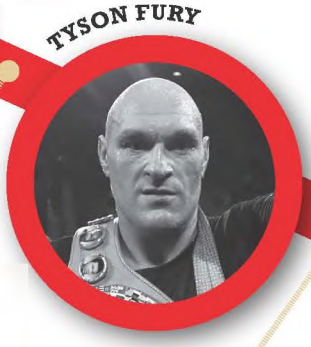
HOLMES UD 12 MERCER
Feb. 7, 1992



RAY MERCER

WLADIMIR KLITSCHKO

KLITSCHKO TKO 6 MERCER
June 29, 2002



TYSON FURY

FURY UD 12 KLITSCHKO
Nov. 28, 2015

OLEKSANDR USYK

USYK SD 12 FURY
May 18, 2024

Fights only last a matter of minutes, but fighters are connected to each other by chains that extend for decades – even centuries – into the past. Their bond is a lineage built face-to-face – a young prospect struggles with the skills of an aging veteran whose nose was once broken by a fighter now enshrined in the International Boxing Hall of Fame. In that way, muscle memory carries knowledge and boxers face a piece of everyone their opponent has fought, everyone those people fought, and so on.

Sometimes those chains are surprisingly short. For current Ring/WBA/WBC/WBO heavyweight champion Oleksandr Usyk, there are just nine opponents between him and the first Ring magazine heavyweight champion, Jack Dempsey.

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